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THE

Interior of Jesus and Mary.

Translated from the French of The
REV. J. GROUT, of the Society of Jesus.

EDITED, WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND PREFACE, BY

REV. S. H. FRISBEE, S.J.

In Two Volumes.

VOL. I.

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THE EDITOR TO THE READER.

THIS little book, which we beg you to read, has gone through more than twenty editions in French, and has been translated into every European language. Of the English version there have been several impressions and it has had a wide circulation, but has been out of print for some years. In offering you a new edition both the editor and the publishers have endeavored to make it more worthy of your acceptance. A new *Sketch of the Author and his Works* has been added, as well as an appendix of readings for different seasons; many faults have been corrected and its appearance has been much improved.

The book treats of a subject, however, which should attract your attention more than all else, and this is nothing less than the life of Our Lord and his Blessed Mother. Not that it portrays their exterior life as told in the Gospel, but the spirit of that life, “hidden to the wise and

prudent but revealed to little ones"; for its object, as its name indicates, is to manifest the *Inner Life of Jesus and Mary*. It is, therefore, a book for interior souls—for those who love our Lord enough to wish to do more than to merely keep his commandments, who desire to study what he loved that they may embrace it, and who seek to know better his Sacred Heart that they may make their own hearts and their own lives like unto his. It is especially adapted for the religious who has left all to follow our Lord, and who will find in the study of its pages the promised hundred-fold. But it is not for religious alone. It was written for a lady of the world who wished to know Jesus and Mary better, and many a devout soul living in the world has found light and strength in its pages. As the author well says:

"It does not depend on our own choice to imitate the external circumstances of the life of Christ. God requires this of but few Christians, some of whom he calls to practise the poverty of their Redeemer; others to imitate his hidden life; others to share in the la-

borious duties of his public ministry ; others to participate in his humiliations and sufferings. These various arrangements of Divine Providence are necessarily dependent on the various states and conditions of social life. But all—noble and obscure, ignorant and learned, rich and poor, master and servant—are called to imitate the interior of Jesus Christ, and to all is the faculty of so doing imparted.”

Though called, yet how many there are who fail to find the treasures of the Gospel history. The account seems meagre, for though the treasure is there it is hidden. Such souls will be astonished at the riches disclosed to them by Father Grou, riches suitable for every feast and season. For, as the book treats of every part of our Lord's life, there will be found in it chapters appropriate to accompany Holy Church as she celebrates the feasts of her Spouse from Advent to Pentecost, and in harmony always with the interior spirit which she inculcates. The work may thus be used as a book of meditation or of spiritual reading. To enable our readers to do this more readily we have added to the present edition a list of

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chapters suitable for all the Sundays and the principal feasts of the ecclesiastical year.

The book is also most appropriate for the time of the annual spiritual retreat. Thus religious communities will find it an excellent work for reading at table or in common during this time, while those who go through these spiritual exercises by themselves may easily choose from it every day readings in harmony with the subject of their meditation. We have added in an appendix a list of such readings according to the subjects generally given during a retreat.

All is so clearly written that we know but one point in which the author may be misunderstood, and that is his doctrine on prayer. He would have us go to God with the greatest simplicity, leaving aside all studied discourse, and not attaching too much importance to reasonings and methods. "Let the heart alone speak and let it express what it feels. When it has no feeling let it groan over its insensibility ; let it complain lovingly to God of this, and let it tell him all by its silence." The reader need but turn to the latter part of Chapters V. and VII., and especially to

Chapter XXXII, of the Interior of Jesus to see how clearly and forcibly our author has treated this subject. But it is just here that a word of caution is necessary. Father Grou, as the reader may see from the following sketch, abhorred Quietism, and yet he speaks here against activity and a too-exclusive use of methods. The silence and repose he recommends is confounded at times by souls, who give themselves to prayer, with Quietism, and they are apt to regard their silence before God as a sort of idleness which is disrespectful to his divine Majesty. But Father Grou is careful to tell them that "the soul that is under the action of God is never for one moment idle, as those imagine who have no true idea of what rest in God really means." The soul must ever be active, first in removing the obstacles, *i.e.*, putting a stop to all agitation, to all over-eagerness and all *restless* activity, that it may give free scope to the action of God, and then, this obtained, still be active in co-operating with his grace. It is the activity which seeks self and creatures that he blames, not that which prepares the soul

for God and co-operates with him. The age of Quietism has passed, and we cannot but think that there is more danger to-day, and especially in our country, from too much activity and natural impetuosity than from quietness and repose.

To those who wish further confirmation of what we have said, we would recommend the little treatise on *Abandonment; or, Absolute Surrender to Divine Providence*, done into excellent English by Miss Ella McMahon. There will be found in it a preface by Father Ramière, and an appendix from Bossuet on the Prayer of Faith, explaining the doctrine of this prayer of repose and affording a sure guidance in this delicate matter, while the whole work forms an excellent sequel to the INTERIOR OF JESUS AND MARY.

FATHER JOHN NICOLAS GROU, S.J.

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

JOHN NICOLAS GROU was born at Calais on the 23d of November, 1731. At a very early age he entered the College of Louis-le-Grand at Paris, then under the direction of the Jesuits. From his childhood he evinced a great love of pious reading and prayer and a tender devotion to the ever-blessed Mother of God, so it is not surprising to find him asking for admission into the Society of Jesus at the age of fifteen. He was duly received, and, after two years of novitiate, he pronounced his vows. In conformity with the usual practice of the Society, he was then employed in the schools, where his literary talents were quickly developed. He particularly admired the writings of Plato and Cicero, on account of their combining with beauty of style a greater sublimity of conception and a higher tone of morality than most of the ancient authors have bequeathed to posterity. The first fruit of his application to the study of the Grecian philosopher's works was a translation into French of Plato's *Republic*, which appeared in 1762 in two volumes. This translation was succeeded by that of Plato's *Laws*, and at a later period by

that of his *Dialogues*, published at Amsterdam in 1769 and 1770. In 1763, when the Society of Jesus was banished from France, Father Grou, with several of his companions, were received in Lorraine by the governor, the Duke Stanislaus. He spent one year at Nancy, and the two following years at Pont-à-Mousson, and there pronounced his last vows. After the death of the Duke Stanislaus the order was banished from Lorraine, so Father Grou repaired to Paris, under the name of *Le Claire*, and lived there in great retirement, dividing his time between study and prayer.

The Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur de Beaumont, temporarily employed him in writing for the benefit of religion, and granted him a pension, which was subsequently discontinued. He was afterwards reduced to great distress, though his manner of life was at all times a model of primitive simplicity. Being introduced by one of his former brethren to a supernaturally favored religious, of the Order of the Visitation, he was induced by the pious exhortations of this holy and interior soul to enter on the ways of a very exalted perfection, and in a retreat of eight days consecrated himself unreservedly to the service of God—dating from this epoch what he termed his conversion. The father was then in his thirty-ninth year, and prayer, habitual attention to the presence of God, total resignation to

the dominion of grace, absolute renunciation of self-will were his characteristic virtues. In his direction of souls he exacted that unqualified submission and perfect simplicity for which he was himself remarkable ; and through this secure path he led many to eminent holiness.

Father Grou devoted to the composition of works of piety every moment which was not claimed by prayer or the duties of his ministry. The first fruit of his zealous exertions in this way was a work entitled *Morale Tirée des Confessions de Saint Augustin*, published at Paris in 1786. The author's plan was to oppose to the pernicious doctrine of unbelievers the precepts of Christian morality, as set forth in the works of St. Augustine ; and he directed his attention first to the *Confessions* of the saint, as being the most generally known of his writings, selecting a certain number of his maxims, and explaining them with perspicuity and unction. Father Clinton* translated this work into English, and had it

* Alexander Clinton (whose true name was MacKensie) was born March 25, 1730, and entered the Society at the age of nineteen. Seven years afterwards he was sent to London, where he labored with great zeal among the poor and in the prisons. In 1781 he was called by Mr. Weld to Lullworth to act as chaplain, and here he remained till he was replaced by Father Brooke, in 1795, when he left for Ireland, where he died June 5, 1800. Father Clinton, besides translating into English several of Father Grou's works, is the author of *The Spiritual Guide*, *The Poor Prisoner's Comforter*, and a *Treatise on Frequent Communion*.

published at London in 1791 and Dublin in 1792 under the title *Moral Instructions extracted from St. Augustine's Writings*. This translation has been out of print for some time, and has become a rare book.

To this publication succeeded, in 1788, *Caractères de la Vraie Devotion*, a work which has gone through many editions and has been translated into many languages. The object of this most instructive work is to define the nature of true devotion, at the same time suggesting the motives which urge and the means which facilitate its practice. Father Clinton also published an English version, *Characters of Real Devotion*, London, 1791, which has passed through at least four editions. Shortly after this volume appeared *Maximes Spirituelles avec des Explications* (Spiritual Maxims Explained), Paris, 1789. In the preface the author explains, in the following words, his sentiments regarding the manner in which he has treated certain abstruse matters introduced in his book: "I solemnly declare the purity of my intentions, from which it is quite foreign to propose anything but what was taught and practised by Jesus Christ. In treating, although cautiously, of those mysterious ways of the interior life which deviate from the common order of God's providence over the soul my explanations may not always prove as correct and

precise as should be. But who can hope to succeed in expounding these obscure matters so luminously as to leave no room for the censure of the critic? I openly profess my abhorrence of quietism, and everything conducive thereto, and sincerely trust that my doctrine on this head will be universally recognized as irreproachable." This public declaration did not, however, screen from animadversion either the work in question or a later production of the same nature.

Father Grou had edited in 1783 a work of Father Marie, S.J., entitled *La Science du Crucifix* (The Science of the Crucifix). This he completed in 1790 in a second work, entitled *La Science Pratique du Crucifix dans l'usage des Sacrements de Pénitence et d'Euchariste* (Practical Science of the Crucifix in the use of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist).

During his residence in France our author had arranged several pious treatises, a copy of many of which he granted to a lady whom he directed. These treatises, forming nine small volumes in 12mo, were published after the author's death in one volume with the title *Manuel des Âmes Intérieures*. An English edition "adapted to the wants of the English church" was gotten out some years since, entitled *The Hidden Life of the Soul*. The original work was much abbreviated and mutilated. A complete and excellent

English translation was published at London in 1889 by the Society of St. Anselm under its true name, *Manual for Interior Souls*.

Father Grou had devoted fourteen years of labor and study to the composition of a voluminous work, the original copy of which he entrusted before his departure from France to a lady resident in that country. She was arrested during the Reign of Terror, and the precious manuscript consigned to the flames by her servants in their undiscerning zeal for the destruction of all such documents as might compromise their mistress' safety. On receiving the tidings, far from betraying any emotion, he calmly said: "If God had wished my work to promote his glory he would have preserved it; since he has permitted it to perish he can use some one else just as well as me."

The existence of Father Grou glided on in apparently uninterrupted calm; he was universally esteemed; enjoyed a pension, the fruit of the king's liberality, and promoted the good of his neighbor by his verbal counsels and written instructions. Meanwhile the Revolution broke out. His first impulse at this alarming epoch was to conceal himself in Paris, there privately to exercise the sacred functions of his ministry; but at the entreaty of the religious to whom we have already alluded, he consented to seek a refuge in

England, and there accepted the home offered him by Father Clinton, at that time chaplain to Mr. Thomas Weld, a wealthy English Catholic, whose mansion, Lullworth Castle, is well known to American Catholics, as it was in its chapel that John Carroll, the first American bishop, was consecrated in 1790. Two years afterwards Father Grou came to live there and was admitted as a member of the family, whose director he soon became, contributing considerably to the spiritual progress of those who sought his guidance by his meekness, his wisdom, and his profound knowledge of the interior life. A devoted friendship between the Weld family and Father Grou lasted during the remaining years of his life; but, notwithstanding the good father's affection for his hosts and their children, he continued to live amongst them in an almost perpetual retreat.

As far as was consistent with his actual circumstances, he observed the rules of the Jesuits. He rose every morning at four o'clock, never allowing himself either fire or candle-light—made an hour's meditation, said his office, and prepared for the holy sacrifice of the Mass, which he never omitted to celebrate up to the period of his last illness. He adhered strictly to the practice of poverty, possessing nothing of his own, and applying with great simplicity for books and clothes when he needed them. His distinguish-

ing characteristics were lively faith, imperturbable serenity under all events, profound humility, great ingenuousness, and ardent zeal.

All the time that was not given to prayer or claimed by his priestly duties he spent in writing. We know from his own testimony that he drew from prayer much more than from study the light he needed to treat of spiritual matters. "In matters of piety I write nothing of myself," he says in one of his instructions. "God directs my pen. When I take it up I do not know what I shall write, and I am the first to marvel at the thoughts suggested to me." In another place he tells us that before writing he used to pray, and when God gave him *de quoi* he wrote freely and rapidly. If he received no light he would wait patiently till God enlightened him. When in a state of aridity he would sometimes seek his penitent, Miss Weld, for whom he wrote *The Interior of Jesus and Mary*, and beg her to pray for him, as God did not give him *de quoi*.

It is thus, with a special light from God, that our author, besides the works already cited, composed four retreats; two small treatises—*Sur le Bonheur* and *Sur la Paix de l'Âme*—both of which have been lost; a book entitled *Le Chrétien sanctifié par l'Oraison Dominicale* (The Christian sanctified by the Lord's Prayer), and *L'École de Jésus Christ*. This latter was trans-

lated into English by Father Clinton, and published under the title *The School of Christ* at Dublin in 1801. The original French work did not appear till 1885, when it was brought out at Paris by Retaux-Bray under the editorship of Father Doyotte. The same lot befell the *Chrétien sanctifié par l'Oraison Dominicale*. It was translated into English by Father Launson, S.J., and published at Richmond, England, in 1817, a correct French edition by Father Cadrès from the original manuscript appearing at Paris only in 1858. Of the four retreats only one has been published, viz.: *Méditations en forme de Retraite sur l'Amour de Dieu* (Meditations, in the form of a Retreat, upon the Love of God). This retreat was composed for Mr. Weld, and was followed by a *Petit écrit sur le don de soi-même à Dieu* (Resignation of One's Self to God), written for Miss Weld. Some expressions were misunderstood as being favorable to quietism. Father Grou revised the work, but the revised edition was only published recently at Paris by Father Cadrès. For Thomas, the eldest son of the family, who became later cardinal, Father Grou composed *Maximes pour la Conduite de la Vie, adressés à un jeune Anglais catholique*. This work has been recently edited by Father Noury under the title *Livre du jeune Homme*.

It was while at Mr. Weld's castle that Father

Grou composed *L'Intérieur de Jésus et de Marie*. This was written for a daughter of Mr. Weld who, under his direction, became afterwards a Visitandine. Father Grou had found that she had a special *attrait* to imitate the Blessed Virgin in her interior dispositions, and to help her he composed *L'Intérieur de Marie*, and finding that she corresponded generously to the designs of Our Lord, and desiring to confirm her in her vocation, he next composed for her *L'Intérieur de Jésus*, finishing both in 1794. Some time after he asked her for the manuscript and made a copy in his own handwriting, introducing many improvements. This done he returned the first manuscript to Miss Weld. The second was found among his manuscripts after his death.

Miss Weld loaned her copy to a French lady, who, with the permission of the former, copied it for her own use. Returning to France, she carried her precious manuscript with her, and thinking the interest of God and the good of souls demanded that she should not keep so great a treasure for herself, she had it published, unknown to Miss Weld, at Paris in 1815. This edition had been made with too little care for publication, but its chief defect was, that it was a reproduction of the first manuscript of the author and not the second, which he had reviewed and considerably improved. A new edition was published in 1824,

a copy of the first, but printed with extreme carelessness. It was disfigured by many misprints and real faults, and these increased in each succeeding edition till 1847, when the work was stereotyped, faults and all. Over four hundred mistakes have been counted in the stereotyped edition. It was only in 1862 that a really authentic edition was published at Paris by Victor Palmé, under the care of Father Cadrès, S.J. He edited for the first time the manuscript which Father Grou had himself revised, and which is still in the possession of the Jesuit College, Rue des Postes, Paris.

In 1847 Miss Kennelly, a religious of the Ursuline community of Black Rock, near Cork, translated *L'Intérieur de Jésus et de Marie* into English. This translation was made from one of the earlier editions, and is therefore free from many of the faults which have disfigured the French stereotyped edition. It is a new edition of this work which we present to our readers. We have compared it throughout with the edition of Father Cadrès and corrected many—we cannot hope all—errors. In the composition of these works Father Grou spent the last ten years of his life, during which he was only once induced to leave Lullworth Castle and join some fellow exiled priests at Wardour. But he felt this to be a distraction, and he never went again. Finally he

ceased writing altogether, saying God did not give him *de quoi*. In 1802 his health gave way to such an extent that on Christmas morning, after saying his first two Masses, he could not proceed with the third. From that time he was unable to stand or lie, but remained for the rest of his life sitting in an arm-chair. He was not idle, though, for he continued to hear confessions, and to edify all who had the privilege of seeing him by his patience and serenity and his continual fervent preparation for death. Father Brooke*—then Mr. Weld's chaplain—used to bring him Holy Communion twice a week and spend much time with him; but he was accustomed to say that Father Grou lived too wholly with God to need any human companion.

It was at this time that Father Grou had the happiness to renew his vows of profession in the Society of Jesus. The society had been suppressed throughout the entire world except in Russia. Some of the English fathers, who had been members before the suppression, received permission from Pius VII. to be received again under Father Gruber, the acting-general in Russia. He appointed Father Marmaduke Stone

* Father Leonard Brooke was an American, having been born in Maryland in 1755. He entered the Society in his nineteenth year, and, after his ordination, passed the greater part of his life as chaplain to Mr. Weld, succeeding Father Clinton in that office. He died in 1813.

provincial, who, probably in April or May, 1803, received Father Grou again into the Society. The good father did not long survive his new profession. It seemed that he had only been received again that he might have the happiness of dying a son of the Society. The call came at last and he was ready. On the 12th of December, 1803, his end being evidently near, he received the last sacraments, and the following day, clasping his crucifix and exclaiming, "O my God! how sweet it is to die in thy arms," he expired peacefully and without agony. He was seventy-two years old. Mr. Weld had the following epitaph engraved on his tomb:



HIC SITUS EST
 JOHANNES NICOLAUS GROVIUS,
 SACERDOS,
 PIETATIS CULTOR ASSIDUUS,
 OB CATHOLICAM PROFESSIONEM
 ACTUS IN EXILIUM. HUNC IN AMPLEXU
 CRUCIS DEFUNCTUM INTER SUOS CON-
 DIDIT THOMAS WELD, PIETATIS
 CAUSA. VIXIT ANNOS LXXII.,
 VETERIS INSTITUTI QUOD
 IN SOCIETATE JESU
 CEPERAT, UNICE
 AMANS.
 DECESSIT IDIBUS DECEMBRIS,
 MDCCCIII.
 R. I. P.



AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

JESUS is the one only perfect model proposed to the imitation of Christians, who deserve that appellation only in as far as their sentiments and conduct are regulated by the example of their divine Redeemer. To understand his heavenly doctrine, we need but study his sacred life; for every maxim he inculcated he first strictly reduced to practice; every precept he imposed, every counsel he recommended, he first accomplished, even to the letter. By deep and constant meditation on the most minute details of his divine life, we shall learn how to act under circumstances similar to those in which he was placed. But his interior dispositions, which were the spirit and life of his external actions, more particularly claim our attentive consideration. We shall never speak, act, or suffer like him, unless we think and feel as he did. We must endeavor to penetrate the hidden secrets of his mind and heart; for in his internal dispositions, above all, it behooves us to resemble him. Yet, let us not for a moment imagine that our most profound investigations can fathom the mysteries of that divine soul. What can we know of it, except what he may himself be pleased to dis-

cover to us? This precious favor, the great source of all others, he grants only to those who ardently desire and earnestly implore it, disposing themselves for its reception by extreme fidelity to grace. Do we rank among this number? Do we aim at the knowledge of the interior dispositions of Jesus Christ? Is our aspiration after this knowledge founded on an humble desire to render our souls a faithful copy of the divine original? Are our petitions chiefly directed to the attainment of this surpassing favor? Do we endeavor to deserve it, by docile submission to the inspirations of the Spirit of God? Oh! how few there are even among those openly professing piety, who can answer this question in the affirmative. And hence it is that so few Christians are spiritual and interior, though all should be so, each according to the measure of grace bestowed on him.

In treating of the interior dispositions of the ever-blessed Mother of God, I shall strictly confine myself to the details derived from the Gospel and the traditions of the Church. It has not pleased God to impart to us the minute particulars of her holy life; but the little we know is sufficient for our instruction and edification. Respectfully submitting to the designs of supreme Wisdom, let us refrain from desiring the knowledge it has been his will to withhold.

THE
INTERIOR OF JESUS AND MARY.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

THE INTERIOR OF JESUS WAS ADMIRABLY FITTED TO REALIZE GOD'S MERCIFUL DESIGNS IN THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

TO conceive an idea of the interior perfections of Jesus, we must first consider what the designs of God were in allying the Divinity to human nature. The Almighty foresaw from eternity, and permitted in time, the commission of the original transgression, which involved the eternal perdition of Adam and his posterity; but determining that the first man should not be consigned, like the rebel angels, to irremediable misery, he resolved to repair the dire misfortune in a manner which should redound to his own glory and to our salvation. In this view he se-

lected from among the sons of Adam one Being, whom he destined as a Mediator of reconciliation between the human race and its offended Maker, and as a voluntary Victim for the expiation of all the crimes which had outraged the sanctity of God since the dawning of time. That chosen Being was designed to satisfy the justice and to disarm the anger of God, by bearing in his own person all the punishment due to sin; and, by his obedience and self-immolation, he was to restore to God a degree of glory far transcending that of which sin had deprived him, as well as to exalt man to a state of being preferable to that whence he had fallen. But had this Being been a sinner, like to the rest of mortals, and consequently incapable of satisfying the justice of God for his own offences, how could he have effected a reconciliation between the human race and the justly irritated God of holiness? It was indispensable that the Victim for the crimes of men should be free from the least blemish of sin—exempt even from the stain of original guilt. It was further requisite that this spotless Victim should be holy as well as innocent, presenting to the eyes of God a vision worthy of his immaculate sanctity. Yet, however pure, however innocent, however perfect, no mere mortal could offer to the Almighty a satisfaction proportioned to the enormity of an offence directed against the

sovereign majesty of the Godhead ; it was necessary that this satisfaction, finite in itself, should derive infinite value from the dignity of the person by whom it was offered ; and that, in consideration of this infinite value, it should be acceptable beyond the power of rejection. It is evident that only a Divine Victim could combine all these qualifications ; and, therefore, it follows that the Mediator between God and man could be no other than an incarnate Deity. He should necessarily be incarnate, to endure the humiliations and penalties due to man ; and he should equally be God, to communicate to those humiliations and penalties a value adequate, to, or rather infinitely surpassing, the extent of the debt due by earth to heaven.

Such was the object which the eternal mind of God proposed to itself in the mystery of the Incarnation—a mystery which, by its very incomprehensibility, discovers to us the enormity of sin, whether considered with reference to the God whom it offends or to the unhappy mortal who incurs its heinous guilt. Sin is so great an evil that, had not a Man-God undertaken to expiate it, the insult offered to the Deity by its commission would have subsisted for ever ; and all the united sufferings of the whole human race for eternity would have been inadequate to atone for its malice.

The works of God invariably tend to some useful purpose ; such is the general rule, applicable most especially to the greatest of his works—the masterpiece of his power and wisdom. The incarnation of the Son of God is but a means for the attainment of a certain end. That end is twofold: it embraces, first, the glory of God—not the essential glory he derives from himself and can never forfeit, but the glory he claims from his creatures, which it is in their power to withhold ; it embraces, secondly, the salvation of man, to whom is promised the reward of eternal life, on condition that he voluntarily co-operate in the designs of God, by contributing here below to his Maker's glory. And since the means used for the attainment of any object are, of their own nature, subordinate to that object, we may infer the sublimity of this twofold end from the grandeur of the means employed to secure it ; we may likewise conceive the malice of sin, which alone can frustrate that end and render abortive the means used to attain it.

In Jesus Christ the divine nature and the human nature were united in the person of the Word. That union commenced at the moment of his conception ; it was common to his body and soul : it was indissoluble—beyond the power even of death to sever. In virtue of that union, there existed but one person in Jesus Christ—the per-

son of the Word ; so that the thoughts, words, actions, and sufferings of his sacred humanity were the personal productions of the Word ; and in consequence of this identity of person, it is equally true to assert that the Son of God is the Son of Mary, and that the Son of Mary is the Son of God.

This honor is unquestionably the highest to which the Almighty could exalt human nature ; it is a purely gratuitous favor, that neither the soul, and far less the body, of Jesus Christ could ever merit. It was the result of God's most special predilection for that sacred soul and immaculate flesh—a predilection surpassing in intensity all the love he ever felt or will feel for the united hosts of men and angels.

In virtue of this union, Jesus Christ, as man, was replenished with every grace ; from his plenitude it is that we receive those given to us. The fulness of grace was bestowed on him, that he might communicate to us of his abundance ; he is not impoverished by imparting his treasures, nor is the source of the heavenly fountain diminished by the communication of its living waters ; for *God does not give the Spirit* to his Son as he does to us—*by measure* (St. John iii. 34). His understanding was filled with “all the treasures of wisdom” (Colos. ii. 3) ; consequently, his knowledge of the Deity, its nature and perfec-

tions, its sovereign dominion over all creatures, and its productions, both in the natural and supernatural order of things, was immeasurably elevated above that of the most sublime intelligences. His will was impeccable, incapable of the least imperfection, free only in the selection of good, and fixed in a constant and invariable determination to do and suffer all things for the glory of his Father. His divinity exercised an absolute dominion over his sacred humanity, maintaining it in a state of voluntary, total, and perpetual subjection.

What must have been the sentiments, what the virtues, of such a soul! Faith and hope, which are consequent on the imperfection of our present state of being, could not exist in him, who at all times beheld God intuitively, and incessantly enjoyed the bliss attached to that transporting vision. But how inflamed was his love for his eternal Father! How lively his zeal for the glory of the Godhead! How deep and heartfelt his grateful sense of those divine benefits, of which he clearly understood the value! How profound his humility—or, rather, his annihilation! How ardent his charity towards men! I do not allude to the active exercise of these virtues, but to their infused habit, such as it was imparted to the soul of Jesus Christ at the moment of its creation and union with the Word.

The original perfection of this habit was not susceptible of any increase, subsequent acts of virtue adding nothing to his plenitude.

The natural qualifications of the Son of God corresponded with his supernatural endowments. His soul was gifted with faculties immeasurably elevated above those of the angelic spirits; it was enriched with heavenly knowledge, emanating from the increated wisdom of the Divinity. His sentiments were upright, noble, pure, and refined beyond conception. His only passion was the love of good and hatred of evil. Self-love, with its consequences, had no existence in him. All the operations of his being were subordinate to the supreme will of the eternal Word; and his sacred humanity accomplished its destined labors and endured its appointed sufferings without attributing or referring any of its acts to itself. Absolute lord of his imagination and his passions, Jesus Christ experienced from them only those impressions which he himself willed, when he willed, and as far as he willed; and his sovereign pleasure in this respect was regulated by the will of his Father—consequently, by his own, he being God equally with his Father. Nothing ever occurred within the sanctuary of his sacred soul, either dependently or independently of the body, either by the impulse of his own will or by the will of others, which had not

been decreed from eternity—which had not been previously revealed to him by anticipated light—which was not referable to the great object of his mission, and which he did not fully and freely submit to, in the view of fulfilling that exalted object. His sacred body was the immediate production of the Holy Ghost; therefore, its movements and powers, far from opposing, all tended to second the operations of his soul. The connection between the two, and the subordination of one to the other, were truly admirable. Never were the movements of a perfect piece of machinery more entirely subordinate to invariable mechanical laws, than were the corporeal sensations of the Man-God to the directing influence of his soul. In a word, though voluntarily liable to the miseries incidental to human nature, Jesus Christ was, both in body and soul, the most finished masterpiece that ever issued from the hands of the Almighty Creator: compared with his perfection, that of the first parent of the human race dwindles into nothing. To crown all, the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ was exalted by its union with the Word to a degree of sanctity inferior to that of God alone. Such were the necessary results of the Incarnation, as regarded our divine Redeemer; and hence we may form a faint idea of the perfections of his adorable interior. Let us not lose sight of these fundamental principles,

as they will essentially facilitate the comprehension of the truths about to be developed.

Terrified at the contemplation of a degree of perfection whose depths created intelligence cannot fathom, you will ask how the interior dispositions of Jesus Christ, such as I have described them, can be proposed to you as an object of imitation? I reply that such imitation does not depend on your own efforts ; and I further assert that, in supposing so, you altogether mistake the nature of the exertions required of you. Jesus Christ contributed nothing, by his personal operations as man, to the sublime dispositions resulting from his union with the Word. This union, which necessarily included the plenitude of all graces, was a gratuitous gift of God, bestowed on the sacred humanity of our Redeemer only in consideration of the exalted ends which that sacred humanity was to co-operate in fulfilling. Those ends were, to repair the insults offered to the outraged majesty of God, to pay the price of redemption, to satisfy for the sins of the human race, to re-conduct man to the path of rectitude whence he had strayed, and to merit for him the graces necessary to the attainment of eternal happiness. Jesus Christ alone is the innocent "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (St. John i. 29) ; he is the one true worshipper, who, in his own name and ours,

offered to his eternal Father the acceptable sacrifice of adoration in spirit and in truth. He is the only Victim that man can present to his Maker worthy to find acceptance before God, and capable of adequately honoring the Supreme Majesty—the only Victim in whose name a creature can confidently claim the graces necessary for salvation. So far, the designs of God on Jesus Christ were necessarily limited to the Redeemer alone. He never had, nor ever will have, similar designs over any of his elect; therefore he never did nor ever will do for any creature what he accomplished in favor of his divine Son. Yet, we know by faith that the Almighty has peculiar designs of sanctity over each of the elect; we also know that, in conformity with these designs, he not only endows his chosen ones with natural dispositions adapted to the fulfilment of his merciful views, but that he likewise prepares for them supernatural graces, abundantly sufficient to raise them to the destined degree of sanctity; so that if they fail in its attainment, their misfortune cannot be imputed to want of liberality in their eternal Benefactor. In this sense, it is true to assert that God has done for his elect what he did for Jesus Christ, and that he expects from them a proportionate correspondence with his designs. On the part of God, nothing is wanting to us, any more than to

Jesus Christ ; he requires not from us, any more than he did from him, to do or to suffer anything for which he has not provided adequate helps. One has received five talents, another two, another one—each according to his individual capacity. The liberal Donor is surely entitled to require that these talents be rendered productive, according to the various degrees of their original value. The heart of man, in which the good seed of the Word is sown, is not always equally fertile. Sometimes it yields only thirty, sometimes, again, it produces sixty, and sometimes even a hundred-fold. This difference of fertility in the soil depends on the will of God, who dispenses his treasures to each soul according to his own good pleasure and his peculiar designs over her. But with ourselves it rests to reap from the gift of God the measure of fruit appointed by the almighty Donor ; and we are more or less culpable if, through our want of co-operation, the profit does not correspond with the value of the talent, nor the harvest with the richness of the soil. In this attainable point alone, it is, that the interior of Jesus Christ is proposed to our imitation.

Laying aside all useless retrospection of the years that are gone, let us humbly implore pardon for our past infidelities—a pardon which will infallibly be granted if the entreaty for it be ac-

accompanied by a sincere determination to repair past negligence by future zeal and fervor. Let us enter in sincerity into the depths of our hearts, and begin the work of reformation by turning to account the grace of the present moment. Let us serve God with unswerving fidelity, undeterred even by our faults, which, provided we quickly rise from them, will serve only to humble us, to encourage us, to diminish a vain reliance on our own weak efforts, and to increase our confidence in the powerful assistance of our Almighty Helper.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE OBLATION OFFERED TO THE ETERNAL FATHER BY JESUS CHRIST AT HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD.

THE first act of Jesus Christ on coming into this world—that is, at the moment of his conception in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary—was to devote himself as a victim to the will of his Eternal Father. This truth we learn from St. Paul, who attributes to our divine Redeemer, at the instant of his creation, the use of the sublime act of oblation contained in the thirty-ninth Psalm; “Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and oblation

thou wouldst not : but a body thou hast fitted to me : holocausts for sin did not please thee. Then said I, behold I come : in the head of the book it is written of me : that I should do thy will, O God " (Heb. x. 5, 6, 7). The Psalmist adds, "I have desired it, and thy law is in the midst of my heart " (Ps. xxxix. 9).

Jesus Christ thus substituted himself for the victims of the old law, which were but a figure and shadow of the one, great and divine Victim of the new dispensation. He surrendered his sacred flesh to be immolated in lieu of the holocausts of old, which of their own nature were unworthy of God's acceptance, inadequate to honor his sovereign Majesty, and incapable of estimating his benefits, of atoning for sin, or of purchasing for man the graces of heaven.

By the consecration of his being to God, Jesus Christ performed a solemn act of recognition that he was not his own possession, that he did not exist for himself, that his humanity was created only to be sacrificed for the glory of his Father and the salvation of mankind. He anticipated the actual immolation of that humanity by the voluntary, prompt and generous act of a will which, being totally unrestrained in its operations, was as free to reject as it proved ready to submit to the great sacrifice.

How many acts of virtue are included in this

one great act of dedication ! It was an act of the most profound adoration, and of the most perfect homage ever offered to the supreme majesty of the Deity. It was an act of unbounded love, whereby Jesus Christ devoted his life to him from whom he had received it. It was an act of absolute submission of his will to the will of his Father. It was an act of humility, or rather of self-annihilation, in virtue of which he surrendered himself as a victim for destruction. It was an act of incomprehensible charity to man, in whose name and for whose sake the Lord of glory became a willing sacrifice, only that he might rescue his guilty creatures from perdition, and restore their right to their heavenly inheritance. The life of Jesus Christ on earth was but the development and practical fulfilment of that first great oblation, which embraced the most minute details of his mortal career. At the very moment when his lips pronounced and his heart ratified the generous act of unreserved devotion, a distinct view of his future sufferings, both exterior and interior, was presented to his all-seeing mind ; he foresaw their number, their extent, their nature, and their duration. He saw all—he accepted all, and voluntarily entered on that lonely road of desolation and sorrow which was to lead slowly but too surely to Calvary. His cross was ever before him ; every step he

took on earth was a conscious and voluntary approach towards that great term of his warmest aspirations, and most ardent desires. And here it is that the interior dispositions of Jesus Christ first become imitable to the Christian. Devotion to God may, in fact, be called the fundamental point of the imitation of Christ, and on it, I venture to assert, all else depends. It is the soul of piety, without which true religion cannot exist. "Love," says St. Augustine, "is the pure homage of the creature to his Creator, and the measure of that love must necessarily be regulated by the measure of devotion." To be a Christian is to be devoted to God in heart and mind; exterior forms and practices of religion are but a mockery, unless they spring from that interior devotion which should be the regulating principle of man's whole conduct.

Meditate with deep attention on the voluntary consecration of Jesus Christ to God; study its nature and its qualities; endeavor to imitate its perfection, and for this end submit, as he did, unreservedly, at all times, and under all events, to the will of God; look on the glory of your Maker as the first great end of your being, subjecting even your spiritual and eternal interests to the interests of God's honor, and considering yours solely with reference to his. To labor for the great affair of salvation only with a view

to self; to fulfil the duties of a Christian merely from fear of the punishment which awaits their omission, or the anticipation of the reward which is to crown their faithful discharge, though doubtless a good disposition, is with equal certainty a very imperfect one, springing from devotion to self, rather than devotion to God. Such devotion is not pursued to the voluntary and formal exclusion of the motive of God's glory, in which case it would degenerate into a great crime; but, nevertheless, it considers only as a secondary object the promotion of that glory which ought to be the primary and principal end of devotion. Fear is the beginning of wisdom, hope its progress, love and devotion its consummation. Labor for salvation, perfection, sanctity; but do not limit your view to this; soar higher still, and in the pursuit of your salvation and sanctification, look to the promotion of God's glory which, being the last end of your Creator, should likewise be yours.

The truths here laid down are sanctioned by the example of our adorable model, Jesus Christ. The point proposed to our consideration is not a mere optional counsel but a formal precept, differing in nothing from the solemn command imposed on all men to love God with their whole heart. Of whatever explanations this commandment may be susceptible, all ultimately prove

that its fulfilment necessarily presupposes devotion to God. Christians do not direct their attention as earnestly as they should to so important a matter. I will even venture to assert that preachers, directors, and spiritual writers are not sufficiently urgent in enforcing the imitation of Christ in this all-essential particular. If the grosser crimes of Christians cannot be imputed to the carelessness with which they overlook a point of so much consequence, at least it is justifiable to trace to this source their tepidity, their indifference, their imperfections—even their annoying scruples, perplexing doubts, and tormenting pains of conscience. A soul unreservedly devoted to God is elevated by grace above the reach of similar annoyances; they are in fact the portion only of the ungenerous, mercenary spirit which seeks to enter into a compromise with its Maker, and to retain for itself all it dares to refuse to God without prejudice to its own interest. If sorrow and suffering alight on a soul devoted to God, it is that such trials are permitted by an all-wise Providence to purify her virtue and try her fidelity. Her trials are, in fact, the consequences of her devotion to her heavenly Father, and widely different in their nature from the sufferings of the ever-restless heart, which knows no peace, precisely because it will not yield its devoted love to the only real source of true

peace. Devotion to God leads the soul to the entrance of the path of perfection, and, while she steadily pursues her course therein, she can be neither tepid nor careless. As long as she perseveres in devotion to God she is under the dominion of grace, and nature will assert its claims only when she revokes her oblation, or permits the fervor of that devotion to grow cold.

Why, it may be asked, were the primitive Christians in general interior men? Why did the terms, Christian and interior men, convey to their minds but one and the same idea? And how is it, on the contrary, that Christians of the present age, far from possessing or aspiring to any knowledge of the interior life, look on it as a very unnecessary appendage to religion, some considering it a mere delusion of fancy, others a dangerous theory which prudence forbids them to investigate? The answer to these questions is simple. The primitive Christians, who were converts from among the Jews or Gentiles, believed implicitly that to embrace the religion of Christ, and to devote themselves to God, after the example of their divine Master, was one and the same thing. They believed a Christian to be a heavenly being, whose only tie to earth is necessity; who should be ready to renounce fortune, friends, relatives, country, reputation, and even life, when the glory of God requires the

sacrifice; who should perpetually oppose the suggestions of corrupt nature; who should yield unreservedly to the impressions of grace, submit unconditionally to the guidance of the Spirit of God, and regulate his whole conduct by supernatural principles. The effect of baptism on them was an entire consecration of their hearts to God; an eternal divorce from the world and the devil; absolute renunciation of self; total death to sin; an irrevocable engagement to enter on a new life; in fine, the devotion of all their powers to the imitation of their divine Model. They received the sacrament of regeneration with a distinct knowledge of the duties it imposes, and all their subsequent efforts were directed to the preservation of the purity of conscience imparted by its redeeming waters. To attain this end, they cautiously avoided dangerous occasions; they had constant recourse to the powerful helps provided by prayer, the sacraments, and religious instruction, and they assiduously cultivated the virtues which should characterize the Christian. To their children, who had received baptism in early infancy, they incessantly recalled the obligations contracted by the reception of that sacrament; they formed their tender minds to piety; they led them early to the assemblies of the faithful; they provided them with abundant instruction, and sedulously watched over the treas-

ure of their infant purity. Children thus consecrated to heaven by their parents, ratified that act of devotion when they attained the use of reason, and the grace of God encountered no obstacle to its operations in hearts so well prepared to receive its divine impressions.

Are the ideas entertained of religion at the present day similar to these? Do parents endeavor to imbue with them the young minds of their offspring? The glorious title of Christian was conferred on us almost as soon as we could claim the appellation of living beings: do we ever recall the obligations contracted for us in baptism, at a period when we were incapable of comprehending their nature? Do we renew them in our own name? Do we even endeavor to understand their meaning? Do we comprehend the doctrine of St. Paul, that in virtue of our baptism, we are no longer our own, that we belong to Jesus Christ, that we ought to be clothed with Jesus Christ, that our thoughts and feelings should be regulated by those of Jesus Christ, and our exterior conduct spring from these interior principles? Do we understand, that being already the possession of God by baptism, it now only remains to us to prove by living for him alone, and dying to all beside, that we really consider ourselves irrevocably his? Is this language intelligible to us? do we be-

lieve that it is addressed to us? comparing it with our mode of thinking and acting, must we not own that it sounds like the echo of an unknown tongue? Persons professedly devoted to God's service (and to these alone I allude at present) discharge with exactitude those essential duties which cannot be neglected without sin, and to this the most fervent add the observance of some external forms of devotion. The greater number, even in the holiest conditions in life, serve God from self-interest, and not for the glory of their Creator; their only object is to secure salvation, and if they form any occasional aspirations after sanctity, it is to appropriate this perfection, and to feed their self-love on the gratifying vision of their virtue and regularity. But to forget themselves, or at least to look to God's glory in the first instance, considering their personal interests as subordinate to his; to refer themselves unreservedly to God; to occupy themselves principally with the promotion of his honor and the accomplishment of his will; to look on themselves as creatures devoted to his glory, and existing for that alone; to be in habitual readiness to do all, to suffer all, to sacrifice all for his sake, believing this to be the original foundation, and the ultimate end of piety, this is a system of morality which few indeed understand or practise, because to com

prehend and reduce it to action, it is necessary to rise superior to the love of self, to yield to the influence of grace, and to be led as children of God by the Spirit of God.

This mode of thinking and acting is, you say, beyond the powers of nature. It certainly is; but then the disciple and imitator of Jesus Christ should be a supernatural being; he begins to deviate from the example of his model as soon as he listens to the suggestions of nature. If he thinks himself authorized to yield at all to its claims, can his devotion to God be said to resemble that of his Redeemer? If it can be proved that the devotion of Jesus Christ was impaired by any reserve, or restricted within any fixed limits, we are entitled to avail ourselves of the same privileges; but if, on the contrary, we find that he not only did not, but could not limit the extent of his devotion, we must own that we cannot claim exemptions condemned by his example. He devoted himself for our sakes, in our persons, and in our name; can we then think ourselves at liberty either to refuse to God the devotion of our being, or to restrict the bounds of that devotion at pleasure?

But, you will ask, is this absolute and unre-served devotion practicable? It must be so, since in this point, above all others, the example of Jesus Christ is proposed to our imitation. By

an act of devotion he commenced his mortal career, and by it also he desires that we enter the career of perfection, of which we shall never attain the term through any other means than entire devotion. Such devotion must be practicable, since it is a necessary condition of the fulfilment of God's command to love him with our whole heart. It is evident that if our devotion to God be limited, so must our love for God be likewise, and that unless our devotion be as absolute as the measure of grace given to us demands, we formally refuse to comply with the first and greatest of God's precepts. It must be practicable, for so it was proved by the example of the saints, that is of all true and perfect Christians, who attained sanctity only by the practice of unqualified devotion to their Creator. Peruse their lives, and you will invariably find, that after receiving the strong impression of that grace which called them to a career of holiness, their first act was to devote themselves to God, who immediately took possession of their whole being, and disposed of them for his glory, according to his will. Some devoted themselves to God in the morning of life, others at a later period; some had previously pursued a career of innocence, others a course of iniquity; some embraced one condition in life, others another, each according to his vocation, but all without

exception were devoted to God. Their first step in the road of sanctity was an act of oblation to their Maker, and fidelity in the practical fulfilment of that act was the means which led to the consummation of their holiness. The measure of grace bestowed on each was unequal, but all were faithful to the degree imparted, at least all were influenced by an unvarying disposition of the will to be faithful to it; all seriously endeavored to correspond with it; all reproached themselves with their slightest infidelities, and rendered occasional faults subservient to their ultimate sanctification.

You do not aspire to be a saint, you say; you aim only at being a good Christian. Think you that the saints aspired to anything else than to be good Christians, or that they expected to attain this exalted end of their desires by any other means than that of perfect devotion? They did not understand your critical distinctions between a Saint and a Christian; nor did they comprehend any difference in the meaning of the words Christianity and entire consecration to God. Imperfection, tepidity, and crime have found their way among Christians only since the introduction of this false and pernicious distinction. The lives of men were more pure before they had learned to separate the interior devotion of the heart from the essence of Christian perfection.

You object, that the life of a truly devoted Christian is one of intolerable restraint. This is a great error, the result only of inexperience. On the contrary, no being is so happy, none so blessed, as the Christian unreservedly devoted to his God ; in fact, he alone is happy. An unprejudiced view of the reasons on which I found this assertion will convince you of its truth, and the secret voice of your own heart will, if listened to, concur in the testimony. Whence proceed your difficulties in the practice of virtue ? Is it from the nature of virtue itself ? No ; but from the weakness of your will, from your resistance, from want of firmness in your determination to avoid all that is evil and practice all that is good, from an ungenerous effort to compromise with God, promising obedience on some points, refusing it on others—from your having marked out certain limits, beyond which you will not pass, from your anxiety to consult the dictates of self-love, and, partially at least, to reconcile the claims of nature with those of grace—in a word, from your pursuing the service of God solely with a view to your own eternal interests. This is, in fact, the primary source of the annoyances and mortifications which often render the sweet yoke of the Lord so heavy and his light burden so irksome. You are ungenerous with God, and his liberality is consequently restrained in your re-

gard; he withholds those powerful graces which would triumph over all obstacles; he is not obliged to bestow them, and you are certainly too mercenary, too selfish, too forgetful of what you owe him, to deserve them. You never feel the sweet consolations in prayer reserved for the devoted soul; you are insensible to the attractions of your God, and, in return, he treats you with corresponding coldness; from this mutual indifference result the tepidity and negligence with which you pursue his service, the difficulty with which you move through a narrow, thorny, rugged road, where obstacles arrest your progress at every step. Ask of the truly, the generously devoted Christian, if he does not run, if he does not fly along that same path, in which you toil so slowly and painfully? ask him if he does not find it more smooth and level, in proportion as he advances farther? ask him if he is ever weary, disheartened, disgusted, or tempted at every moment, as you are, to turn back? And yet, he does incomparably more than you; he never spares himself; his only apprehension is lest he may not do enough for God; he cheerfully embraces the whole weight of the burden, and, far from attempting to decrease it, he adds the observance of the counsel to the fulfilment of the precept, and joins to obligatory duties, exercises practised only by those who aspire to perfection.

Your pusillanimity revolts from the contemplation of the life he leads, yet ask him if he would exchange it for yours; ask him if his soul does not overflow with happiness—if one interior visit from the God of his heart does not indemnify him for all his sufferings; ask him if he does not drink deeply at the fathomless fountain of that peace which, according to St. Paul, surpasses all understanding, and imparts to him a foretaste of the eternal peace to come? You pity him—you cannot fancy how he endures such a life; but you know not that he also compassionates you, and with far more reason; he deplores your blindness and folly; he cannot imagine how you consent to be the willing agent of your own misery, by neglecting the service of the great, the good, the liberal Master, to whom he has devoted his life and best exertions. Can you point out a single saint whose sentiments differed from these? Can you name one who did not date his true happiness from the period of his perfect devotion to God?—one who did not join the penitent Augustine in weeping over the years spent in any other pursuit than the knowledge and the love of the eternal Beauty? Can anything be more just or more reasonable than the devotion proposed, as a necessary condition to your entrance on the career of a true Christian? What is required? An upright and generous

disposition of mind and heart, leading to a fixed determination to give yourself without reserve to God; to abandon confidently to his sweet providence the entire disposal of your being for the time to come; to yield with unqualified submission to the dominion of his grace, and to renounce that self-guidance which, from your utter inability to direct yourself, must necessarily end in ruin. What else is required? To accept beforehand the afflictions which divine wisdom may consider necessary to your salvation, so that when the appointed hour of trial comes you may be prepared to give a solid proof of your fidelity to God by receiving your sufferings with resignation, and supporting them with such peace, patience, and love, as will render them available to the glory of God and your own salvation. In a word, what is required of you, but simply to co-operate with God's eternal designs of predestination over you?—designs which, unless opposed by yourself, will infallibly result in your everlasting bliss. This is the summary of the obligations entailed by devotion to God. Is anything unreasonable required, either as regards the Almighty, or as regards yourself? or can you rationally object to such terms?

To the Lord of heaven you are indebted for the benefits first of creation, and next of preservation. He made you, not for yourself, but for

his own glory, and never can resign his unimpeachable right to the possession of your being. Is it in your power to emancipate yourself from his absolute and universal dominion? Must you not depend on him, either voluntarily or by compulsion? Can you dispose at will of that free agency which is his gift? Are you not strictly bound to consecrate it to him? If your liberty belongs to God, it follows that all else appertains to him. If, as a mere existing being, you are the possession of God, doubly is that possession confirmed by your title of a Christian. Consider all your Creator has done for you; the abyss of unutterable anguish from which he rescued you; the inestimable price he paid for the ransom of your immortal spirit; the inconceivable love he testified for that undying soul; his desire of its salvation; his solicitude for its perfection; the general and particular favors lavished on it with prodigality; in a word, pass in review the many incentives to devotion which religion offers, and you will find that each forcibly urges the necessity, the absolute obligation, of total and unreserved consecration of the whole being to Him who gave it. Your spiritual and temporal interests, both for time and eternity, are intimately connected with, or absolutely dependent on, your devotion to God. Your happiness in the next life, your peace in this, can be secured by it

alone; and whatever may be the state of the soul here below, if at the last hour it be not found animated by the disposition of entire devotion, the gates of bliss will be irrevocably closed against it.

You say you dread the consequences of such perfect devotion. What consequences? Is it the restraint of devotion you apprehend? You know not, then, that according to St. Paul, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. iii. 17). Is it the privation of human comfort you anticipate with alarm? Ah! you are then ignorant that the consolation imparted by creatures is hollow and vain; that, although it may gratify self-love, it can never penetrate the inward dwelling of the soul; never dispel the sadness or calm the agitation of the troubled heart. It is evident you are a stranger to the soothing accents of the God of love, who by a word can sweetly comfort and powerfully strengthen the generous spirit which seeks in him alone support in its sorrows and aid in its difficulties.

Perhaps you fear that the Almighty, availing himself of your oblation, may prove an exacting and rigorous master. Alas! is this your idea of God? Little do you know him, when by entertaining such notions you deeply grieve his most tender and loving heart. Does it afford him pleasure to visit you with suffering, or has he

any other end in view in the sacrifices he requires than your own individual advantage? Is it not your interest to prove to God the sincerity and constancy of your love? Do you not reap, even in this life, the superabundant reward of all you do for him? Animate your faith in his supreme wisdom, and your confidence in his boundless goodness. The exertions and sufferings required from you will be only in proportion to the supernatural help bestowed, and the sacrifices demanded will meet your own entire concurrence, your express consent to them being asked and yielded before they are imposed. You will experience no compulsion in your progress through the path of perfection, nor will you feel the influence of any impelling force, except the sweet and powerful attractions of divine love. God is glorified by such homage, whereas he sets no value on compulsory submission, and for this reason it is that he insists so much on the free devotion of the will.

Perhaps you will urge as a final objection, that by devoting your being to God, you subject yourself to many trials, which you might not otherwise have to endure — a consideration which has much weight with the pusillanimous and ungenerous. Yet, only one of two alternatives remains, either to renounce the Gospel altogether, or to admit that salvation can be

attained but by bearing the cross in company with Jesus Christ. The nature of that cross evidently depends not on our own choice, but on the will of God, who imposes the burden on each soul, according to his peculiar designs of sanctification over her. To what, then, do you subject yourself by devotion to God? Only to bear the trials he has ordained for you from eternity, and to which your salvation is attached. You are ignorant of the nature of those peculiar trials, but you know in a general manner that tribulation is essential for you ; that to rebel against it is to incur the risk of losing your soul, or at any rate to renounce the perfection God requires of you ; and you are further aware that, if you attain salvation under these circumstances, it will be only through late but bitter regret for having refused to share the sorrows of your Redeemer. By willingly embracing the cross in anticipation, you dispose yourself to carry it courageously when it actually offers. And what is that cross for the generality of Christians? It is the persevering and exact observance of the gospel maxims ; it is fidelity in discharging the duties annexed to our condition in life, in defiance of the difficulties and annoyances they involve ; it is the contradictions, the vexations, the vicissitudes, the countless miseries resulting from our present state of being, and ordained

or permitted by that supreme Will which suffers no opposition to its decrees; it is, in fine, the perpetual struggle against self, in which man is engaged on earth, and the constant violence he must offer his inclinations in order to avoid evil and do good. Does this detail comprise any one species of self-denial, to which a Christian should not freely and voluntarily submit in anticipation? His submission, far from increasing either the number or the severity of the afflictions which await him, will, on the contrary, sweeten their bitterness and lighten their weight. It is true that the interior life involves trials of a peculiar nature, but after all, the life of every Christian should be an interior life, for such is certainly compatible with all conditions, whatever may be asserted to the contrary. Moreover, the trials which may be considered its peculiar appendage are infinitely sweetened by the unction of the special graces which are also its accompaniment. Love of the cross is so much the characteristic of interior souls, that, had they nothing to endure for God, life would become insupportable. Extraordinary trials are the portion of a privileged few; these trials are not the result of devotion to God, though before proposing them to the acceptance of the chosen soul, the Almighty urges her to that devotion which is an indispensable preparation for them.

Like Jesus Christ, she sees, if not in detail, at least in a general view, the afflictions through which she is destined to pass, but the sufferings unfolded to her mental vision will not assume their tangible form until she has yielded the voluntary consent solicited by her divine Master.

If you are not previously destined for trials of this nature, they will not result from the fact of your consecration to God; the only consequence of that consecration will be, in some degree, to ensure you the merit of those trials, as if you had really endured them. If you be destined for them, you will materially interfere with your spiritual interests, should you refuse from apprehension of their bitterness to devote yourself unreservedly to the accomplishment of God's holy will, according to the example of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE PARENTS WHOM JESUS CHRIST SELECTED FOR HIMSELF.

EVERY circumstance connected with the life of Jesus Christ had been arranged in the eternal counsels of the adorable Trinity; every event of his human career had been pre-ordained by Christ himself, and disposed with reference to

the one great and only object of his incarnation, the glory of the Godhead and the salvation of the human race. Uncontrolled master of his destiny, he alone of all the children of men selected his condition in life, and chose the parents from whom he was to derive his being. A promise had been given to the prophet king, that the Messiah should descend from his person, and occupy his throne. How was that promise accomplished? According to human interpretation, it seemed to imply that Jesus Christ was destined to fill a conspicuous place among the high born of the land; that he was intended to wield the sceptre of Juda, transmitted from a long line of illustrious ancestors, and that to him it was reserved to consummate the glory of the far-famed family of David. But widely different are the views of God from those of man! To give to earth the long promised, the ardently desired Messiah, the eternal Wisdom waited; not only until the regal dignity had passed away for ages from the sons of David, but longer still, until the remote descendants of the royal prophet had sunk into such extreme indigence and obscurity that the very remembrance of their bygone glory had faded—not only from the memory of the nation at large, but almost from their own recollection. Mary, the destined mother of the Saviour, lived an humble recluse at Nazareth in Galilee. Rich

in the spiritual gifts of grace alone, she subsisted on the fruits of her own exertions and those of her parents; confounded with the crowd, she was in no way distinguished from her fellow-mortals, except by superior virtue. Joseph, her holy spouse, and the reputed father of Jesus, was a poor workman. Both were descended, it is true, from the royal family of David, but how striking the disparity between its ancient splendor, and the lowliness of its fallen scions! Yet these lowly beings it was, whom the eternal Son of the Most High freely selected for his parents, on stooping to an alliance with our nature. This was the first step in his progress towards that true royalty, mean and despicable in man's estimation, but sublime and exalted in the views of God.

What are the practical lessons here inculcated by the example of our divine Model? We cannot, like him, select our original rank in life, that being entirely subject to the control of Providence; we cannot choose between a high and a low, a brilliant and an obscure, an opulent and an indigent condition; but we can regulate our ideas concerning the state in life appointed for us, conformably to the ideas of Jesus Christ. If our natural inheritance be that of the noble, the rich and the powerful, we can be careful not to abuse these gratuitous gifts of our Maker by indulging pride, or presuming to despise inferiors

in station. If, on the contrary, our birth-right be the humble lot of the poor and unknown, we can learn from the example of Christ not to blush at our origin, and not to exert our ingenuity in efforts to banish it from our own recollection, as well as to conceal it from the knowledge of others ; we can learn neither to envy those born in more exalted ranks, nor to look on the inferiority of our own condition as an insupportable humiliation. What are the ideas of men on this point—not alone the ideas of the profane and worldly, but even of those who make an open profession of sincere piety ? Is there any advantage more universally prized than that of high birth ? Is there any greater source of regret to minds developed by education than the want of this advantage ? Neither reason nor religion can conquer the pride of the one, or subdue the secret envy of the other. This is a prejudice imbibed in infancy, the first use children make of their reflecting powers being to consider what they are by birth, comparing themselves with others of their own age ; haughtily maintaining their superiority to some ; reluctantly acknowledging their inferiority to others. This fatal effect of pride extends to the high and low, rendering both equally culpable and unhappy. Even in the cloistered sanctuaries of Christian humility shall we find persons completely divested of this preju-

dice? persons who forget the rank they held, or might have held in the world; who never reveal it to others; who never feel a secret pleasure at the respect evinced for them in consequence of that rank? Shall we find persons there perfectly indifferent in thought and feeling to the obscurity of their origin; persons who never take offence at a real or fancied allusion to the subject; persons who never attribute an accidental observation on the matter to a formal intention of insulting them? What generous efforts were made by our loving Redeemer to remove this fruitful cause of man's restless agitation and perpetual disquietude! To correct our erroneous impressions regarding worldly distinctions was the object of the first lesson he gave us on coming into the world, a lesson taught perseveringly throughout his life, and inculcated with redoubled force at the hour of his death. But to feel all the truth, all the beauty, all the utility of that divine lesson; to value and relish it; to reduce it generously and cheerfully to practice; to learn to judge of rank and station according to the solid principles of true humility, it is necessary to be interior, to be addicted to prayer, to know how to regulate our thoughts and feelings according to the doctrine and the example of the Son of God; it is necessary, in fine, to penetrate deeply into the sanctuary of the heart of Jesus,

and freely to admit the operation of his divine grace on ours. This is not the work of a day ; nor will our efforts ever be crowned with perfect success, unless trials and afflictions complete what grace and reflection have begun. We must narrowly watch our hearts, and as long as we find them influenced by esteem for self, or contempt for others on the score of birth, we should grieve for and blush at the disparity between our dispositions and those of our great example. If the disciples of Christ studied to identify their sentiments with those of their divine Master, the nobly born would regret a distinction which renders them unlike their Model ; they would guard against the vanity so often inspired by the possession of this temporal advantage. Far from dazzling the lowly by the display of their splendor, or oppressing the humble with the weight of their fancied superiority, they would delight in descending to a level with the poor and the outcast ; they would be unassuming and affable in manner ; kind and compassionate in feeling ; in a word, less punctilious, and less exacting of their supposed rights. If those who fill the inferior ranks of society conformed their ideas to those of Jesus Christ, instead of blushing at their lowliness they would glory in it ; they would esteem as a high privilege that arrangement of providence which secured them at least one mark of

resemblance to their Saviour; instead of dreading and shunning, they would embrace with a holy eagerness the humiliations attendant on their condition; they would not take so many precautions to conceal their origin from the knowledge of their fellow-creatures; they would not struggle to rise above their state; neither sadness, suspicion, envy, malignity, hatred, or any other of the detestable offspring of pride would ever find a dwelling in the pure temple of their humble hearts. The great would not abuse their influence and wealth; the poor would be contented in their obscurity; an enlightened view and faithful practice of Christian morality would introduce among men the only species of equality that social order could admit, and from this most desirable reformation in society would naturally result universal concord, union, and charity. O my Saviour! from the moment of thy temporal birth, and even in thy very birth itself, thou didst seek to promote our happiness, and if we fail in its attainment, it can only be because we refuse to enter into thy sentiments and conform to thy views.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES BY WHICH THE
HUMBLE ORIGIN OF JESUS CHRIST WAS EX-
ALTED AND DIGNIFIED.

TO imagine that Jesus Christ selected David for one of his ancestors on account of his regal dignity, would be to form a notion equally erroneous and unjust. He was chosen for that honor because he was a man according to the heart of God (Acts xiii. 22), and the evident proof that his royal rank had no influence on the selection was that Jesus deferred to claim his temporal descent from him until his posterity were reduced to the last degree of indigence and obscurity. The lustre which Christ intended to shed on his humble birth was not to be derived from that worldly pre-eminence, or those earthly distinctions, which could offer no attraction to the incarnate God. How did he exalt his origin? He chose for himself a mother on whom were prodigally lavished the choicest gifts in the treasury of grace; a virgin mother to whom alone was reserved the privilege of an immaculate conception; a saintly mother who from unblemished innocence, eminent holiness, the union, in a word, of all virtues, and that in a degree of

perfection attainable by herself alone, was from the first moment of her creation to the end of life the favored object of God's complacency and predilection. Moreover, instead of adhering to the ordinary laws of nature, he had recourse to a prodigy unheard of before, and never again to be renewed; he formed in the chaste womb of Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, the sacred flesh to which his divinity was to be united, and to complete the miracle, this living body came into the world without violating the virginal integrity of his pure and spotless mother. Sovereign arbiter of the laws of nature, he overturned them all, to impart to his temporal nativity a dignity and grandeur worthy of a Man-God.

But that the lesson of humility he comes to teach may receive no practical contradiction from the prodigy, he carefully concealed it during life; not until after his death was it revealed by Mary to the apostles, and by the evangelists St. Luke and St. Matthew to the church. He shrouded the sacred mystery under the veil of the conjugal union, providing Mary with a spouse pure as herself, who was the witness and the guardian of her virginity. In the eyes of men Joseph passed for the parent of Jesus; he exercised a father's authority over the incarnate Word; his heart overflowed with

more than a father's love for the divine Being entrusted to his care, and his holiness was an approach to the consummate sanctity of his angelic spouse.

If faith were, as it ought to be, the only rule of our feelings, what subject would excite the joy and the gratitude of truly pious children? They would bless their eternal Benefactor, not for the perishable inheritance of rank and opulence, but for the more precious gift of virtuous parents, from whose generosity they have received a good education, and from whose instructions and example they have learned early lessons of true piety. Young persons do not sufficiently understand or appreciate this inestimable advantage, on which depends their happiness for time, and very often for eternity. But when reflection has succeeded to the volatility of early years; when we look on the dangers to which youth is exposed, and from which we have been ourselves preserved; when we observe in every condition the material influence of the virtuous principles inculcated in infancy, and the lasting dominion of good habits contracted in childhood; when we remark, on the other hand, the sad effects of a bad education, the almost irretrievable miseries to which it leads, and the nearly indelible impressions it traces, then it is that, overflowing with gratitude to our divine Benefactor, we bless

him for a gratuitous favor, due to no effort or merit of ours, but the result only of his own great, unbounded goodness.

CHAPTER V.

JESUS IN HIS MOTHER'S WOMB.

ORDINARY children while confined to their mother's womb possess but a very imperfect species of mere animal life; their soul, enveloped in partially formed organs, being incapable of any operation. Not so with the infant God. His soul, from the moment of its union with the body, had not only the free use of its faculties, but also a perfect and entire perception of the ends to which those faculties were to be directed, and without the intervention of a second instant of time it commenced the practice of that devotion to God which no subsequent period of life ever after interrupted. It adored God; it loved him; it submitted to his will; it freely accepted its actual state, all conscious as it was of the humiliation, the inconvenience, the helplessness of that state. Who among us, gifted with reason and reflection to understand its horrors, would consent willingly to return to that condition? Who could endure so long, so excruciat-

ing a martyrdom? Who would descend into so dreary a dungeon? Who would endure the restraint of that prison which compresses the frame into such narrow limits as to render it incapable of a movement? Such was the first step in the painful and humiliating career of Jesus Christ; such the opening scene of his annihilation. He teaches us the extent of God's claims on his creatures; he teaches us also the depth of abjection to which man should voluntarily stoop to give glory to his Maker, did the humiliations due to him depend on his own selection. Jesus Christ submitted to that state for our sakes, and in our person; he embraced it with a view to expiate the first and greatest of our crimes, that fatal pride of which he began thus early to teach us the sinfulness.

What glory redounded to the Almighty from the annihilation of a God who, though equal to his Father, submitted to the last degradation, to do homage to the supreme majesty of the Godhead! What profit may we not derive from the lesson, if we carefully and deeply meditate on it! It is true we shall never perfectly understand it, its very incomprehensibility being, in fact, necessary to convey an adequate idea of the insolent presumption of human pride. It was requisite that two extremes should meet; that two qualities, infinitely opposed, should be combined in the

same person, to show us how far the creature should humble himself before his Creator, and how guilty that creature is when by disobedience to the commands of his sovereign Lord he dares to equal himself to his Maker, nay, even to exalt himself above him. O humility ! first virtue and first duty of the Christian, who shall fear to exceed in thee, seeing the extremes to which Christ carried thee even before his birth?

The first result of our devotion to God should be the union of our hearts with the adoration and annihilation of Jesus in his mother's womb. When we give ourselves to God it is, unfortunately, too often with a view of becoming something great, something distinguished, pride and self-love exercising a strong influence over our dedication to the Lord. Let us now give ourselves to him with no other view than to be entirely consumed and destroyed ; with no other desire than to sacrifice for ever all self-esteem, all anxiety even for our spiritual exaltation ; all personal interests ; all views, considerations, and reflections connected with self. Let us once for all lose sight of ourselves, and give up our being to God alone.

We wish for the spirit of prayer, but we should begin by forming a correct idea of it, and for this end we should attentively contemplate the example of Jesus in his mother's womb. How

sublime, how perfect is his prayer ! He does not speak ; he does not meditate ; he does not produce any particular acts or affections ; his prayer is nothing more than the voluntary submission with which he bows to his actual condition from the pure motive of glorifying God. By his silent resignation to that condition, he eloquently proclaims the dominion of God over him, and impressively teaches the true method of adoring the great Creator. That prayer is always profitable which humbles the soul ; which impresses her deeply with the conviction of her Maker's sovereign perfection, and her own absolute nothingness ; which mortifies her pride, wounds her self-love, and annihilates her natural feelings and inclinations ; in a word, which experimentally proves to her the folly of relying on her own efforts, and deprives her of all resources in self. This we are not willing to believe ; on the contrary, we are often dissatisfied with that prayer which is in reality the most pleasing to God, because the most conducive to our own humiliation. We should never pronounce on the nature of our prayer, for our own judgment on the matter cannot fail to be erroneous. Jesus Christ never indulged in reflections on his ; it was not in his power to do so, for all the faculties of his soul were wholly absorbed in it, wholly engulfed in the vast ocean of the divinity.

CHAPTER VI.

BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST AT BETHLEHEM.

AS Jesus Christ had been conceived at Nazareth, the ordinary residence of Mary and Joseph, it was natural to expect that his birth should occur there likewise; but in order to provide for the fulfilment of the prophecy which declared that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem of Juda (Mich. v. 2; St. Matt. ii. 6; St. John vii. 42) the Almighty had destined otherwise. To bring about the accomplishment of this prediction the sovereign Ruler of the universe had recourse to means which apparently bore no connection with the expected event. An edict was published by the Emperor Augustus commanding a census of all the subjects of the Roman Empire, and, in pursuance with this decree, each family was directed to repair to the place of its origin to be enrolled. Bethlehem being the birthplace of David, Mary and Joseph, together with the rest of the royal prophet's descendants, were obliged to present themselves in that city—neither the delicate condition of Mary nor the indigence of Joseph, which rendered his daily labor indispensable to his subsistence, being sufficient reasons to dispense them

from so long and painful a journey at the most trying season of the year.

From these events the interior soul learns the nature and extent of that dependence on Providence which should be her constant and her cherished practice. She cannot penetrate the designs of God in her regard; neither can she understand the means by which the accomplishment of those designs is to be brought about. If she forms the most trivial plan from an impulse of self-will; if she takes the least step without consulting God; if she rebels against the natural course of events; if, under any pretext whatever, she refuses obedience to those who have authority over her she breaks the chain of Providence, she wanders from the path of submission, she ceases to conform to the order of God's will, and to what dangers is she not consequently exposed? Jesus knew well where his birth was to take place, but his actual state not permitting him the disposal of his person, he abandoned himself to the guidance of his parents, whom he secretly inspired with the holy resolution of abandoning themselves in turn to Providence, and thus unconsciously concurring in the execution of God's designs. This is the most important point in the spiritual life. As soon as the Christian has devoted himself to his God he ceases to belong to himself; he has no longer any right to

dispose of himself; he can have no will but the will of God, which is manifested to him from one moment to another, and requires at all times his, unhesitating and uninterrupted submission. That holy will must be his only guide even with regard to exterior events—such, for example, as change of residence, etc. The whole life of Jesus Christ is a practical illustration of this absolute dependence and inviolable fidelity; and in this point, above all others, was he ever sedulously imitated by his true servants, the consummation of whose sanctity was the perfect union of their will with the will of God.

On the arrival of Mary and Joseph at Bethlehem they sought admittance to its inns, but their efforts proved fruitless, either because the lodgings were already full or because the favorites of God were despised by men for their poverty. The contempt shown to his parents was unconsciously directed principally against Jesus, whose supreme will had pre-ordained it and whose tender love for man voluntarily submitted to its endurance. Thus were the words of St. John verified, even before the birth of him they referred to: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (St. John i. 11). As a consequence of their happiness in being connected with Jesus, Mary and Joseph shared in that contempt, which grieved them far more

for the sake of their divine Infant than for its reference to themselves. Conducted by the Spirit of God, they retired to a deserted stable, and there, conformably to his own eternal designs, the Lord of heaven and Saviour of the earth made his first entrance into this world; there he was laid on a little straw, wrapped in coarse swaddling clothes, and exposed in his helpless weakness to the inclemency of the bitter cold. All the sufferings within the compass of an infant's strength to endure; all the humiliations within the reach of his own wisdom to attach to that state of infancy, were his first welcome into the world he came to bless. But these sufferings and humiliations only excited his joy, because tending to promote the glory of God, and to purchase peace for men of good will.

Innocent and tender Victim of love ! can any being continue insensible to thy goodness while he gazes on thee with the eyes of faith and, at the same time, reflects that for his sake thy early sorrows were encountered? Who can look on thee, and refuse to mingle his tears with thine? But our divine Lord asks not our useless compassion or sterile feelings; he claims not our pity or our sensibility; he desires that we imitate him, that we second his efforts for the destruction of our pride and sensuality. These two vices,

the one spiritual, the other carnal, are the source of all of our sins. Let us unite our hearts to our infant Saviour, and through his merits endeavor to expiate past and guard against future falls. Not content with merely lopping off the branches of the tree, let us lay the axe to the root. Let us embrace the practice of the virtues opposed to these vices, directing our first exertions to the attainment of mortification and humility. To combat and, if possible, to destroy the pride and sensuality of human nature is the great end of the spiritual life, which inspiring the practice of recollection and attention to the divine Presence, and thereby concentrating the soul within herself, annihilates the life of the senses on the one hand, and on the other humbles the spirit by subjecting its faculties to that obscure species of prayer which seems to be a state of idleness and inactivity, because divested of all effort of the imagination, memory, and understanding, and unaccompanied by any perceptible act of the will. When God appears to withdraw from the soul, and that for a considerable time, how bitter, how crucifying is that same exercise of prayer which, while accompanied by the soft unction of heavenly grace, was a source of such exquisite sweetness to the soul ! But, at the same time, how profitable is such prayer rendered by the very difficulties now

experienced in its practice ! That difficulty proceeds from the repugnance of the will and judgment to endure those purifying operations of grace whereby their natural life must be destroyed before we can be rendered conformable to our divine model, Jesus Christ. What a fund of humility must be acquired in that species of prayer, which is crucifying to nature only because it tends to its destruction !

It is not surprising that Christians who seek only their own satisfaction in the practice of piety should greatly dread the interior life which is a perpetual death to nature. Self-love seeks to insinuate itself everywhere, and endeavors to gain strength under all circumstances. It willingly foregoes sensual pleasures, provided they be replaced by those sweet consolations of the spirit which are far more exquisite and more delicately refined. The proud soul will cheerfully sacrifice everything to attain the gift of sublime prayer ; she will rejoice in the light which seems to reveal her own excellence ; she will feed on the heroic sentiments which inspire her with an equal share of esteem for self, and contempt for others. Speak to such a soul of the obscure prayer of pure faith—prayer divested of all consoling impressions and sensible feelings—she will not hear of it ; she will rather give up all than submit to such mortifying subjection.

Deterred by the view of the very first obstacle which crosses her path, how will she endure the trials destined to accumulate according as she advances in the way of the interior life?

Let us beware of falling into fatal mistakes and imbibing erroneous impressions, which must inevitably lead first to illusion and then to perdition. From the crib of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, the interior sentiments and exterior condition of Jesus proclaim a lesson of humility and mortification; we see in his example the gradual progress and final perfection of these two most essential virtues. If we sincerely desire to imitate him, and humbly implore from himself the grace to do so, our prayer will be granted. If, on the contrary, we refuse to follow him by this path we cannot hope to be one day recognized as his disciples.

CHAPTER VII.

JESUS INVITES THE SHEPHERDS TO HIS CRIB.

(*St. Luke ii. 8-18.*)

JESUS CHRIST was invariably consistent in his conduct, because he adhered faithfully to the plan laid down for him from all eternity by his heavenly Father. He was born in poverty; he manifested himself first to the sons of poverty, the objects of his predilection. At first sight,

it would appear as if Providence had arranged the general meeting of the descendants of David at Bethlehem in order that the Messias might be born amidst his own race and solemnly recognized by his relatives. This seems essential, first to manifest the fulfilment of the promise made to David, and, secondly, to prepare the Jews one day to acknowledge Jesus as their Messias. But such were not the views of God. The accomplishment of the prophecies was to be made evident at the appointed time, but their manifestation was not to interfere with the obscurity of the Redeemer's birth, nor to serve as a shield against the trials necessary to purify the faith of his first worshippers. The birth of Jesus was unknown, not alone to the family of David, but even to the inhabitants of Bethlehem in general; Mary and Joseph buried the secret in the depths of their own souls, and, unless God had pleased to reveal it, Judea would have remained a stranger to the prodigy.

That very night an angel announced the wondrous event to some shepherds of the environs. The bright splendor of the heavenly messenger filled them with fear, but he reanimated their courage by saying: "This day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this," he adds, "shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the Infant wrapped

in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger" (St. Luke ii. 11, 12). How strange a sign! And how strong the faith which unhesitatingly yielded to it! Would the news be credible if an angel had not come from heaven to reveal it? The prophets had, indeed, predicted that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem; but they had not described the indigence and misery which seemed to contradict the great things foretold of him; they had not painted the abject poverty which so ill accorded with the previous notions of the Jews.

How many souls desirous to enter on the interior life are under the influence of the same illusion? They seek Jesus, and they say they expect to find him—but under what circumstances? In the splendor of his glory; in the sublimity of heavenly lights; in the overflowing abundance of spiritual consolations; in the midst of extraordinary supernatural favors. Great is their mistake, and equally great will be their disappointment. It is not by such signs as these that the Lord Jesus is to be recognized here below. If you desire to find him, seek him in spiritual infancy; seek him in humility of heart; in weakness, in simplicity, in total abnegation. Occasionally he will permit that the reflection of one beam of his glory brighten your spirit, but soon again the vision will sink in obscurity, and your Lord will remain to you closely shrouded

beneath the dark veil of faith. Limit your hopes and views to the possession of him in this way, remembering that in a more sensible enjoyment of his presence you would have but trifling merit, you would give him but little glory, and testify for him but very weak and imperfect love.

The mere fact of their poverty would not have entitled the shepherds to an invitation to the crib; had they been dissatisfied with their indigence, had they envied the rich or desired the wealth denied them, they would not have been selected for so great an honor. Poverty in itself is not a virtue, nor even a disposition to virtue, if the spirit rebels against its hardships, murmurs at its privations, and vainly struggles to strike off its weighty fetters. Jesus, poor in heart, poor from choice, invites and welcomes those alone who, if destitute of riches, set no value on them; or those, again, who possess wealth, yet are detached from it; who use it as though they used it not; who freely open their stores to the indigent and share their riches with the destitute. But his warmest welcome is reserved for the voluntarily poor, who have renounced all things to follow him, and bound themselves by vow to possess no earthly treasure. These, as his special imitators, are the peculiar objects of his tender love.

However, poverty, in whatever sense it may be

understood, does not lead the soul into the ways of the interior life ; it merely removes the obstacles which obstruct the entrance to the path and smooths the difficulties which multiply in its progress. To simplicity it belongs to unlock the mysterious gate, and guide the soul on the unknown road of perfection. This virtue of simplicity the holy shepherds possessed in an eminent degree. They yielded implicit faith to the words of the angel, though strongly opposed to human prejudices, and without argument or hesitation they instantly repaired to Bethlehem, and there discovered the divine Object whom they sought. Far from wavering in their belief on beholding the scene of destitution, they were only the more encouraged thereby to approach and contemplate their Saviour, to offer him their homage, to testify their love and gratitude, and to present to Mary and Joseph the trivial aid within their reach.

O divine Infant ! who can explain thy secret feelings at that moment ? Who can tell how acceptable was the faith of these simple, upright hearts, how pleasing the worship of these, thy first adorers, how abundant the treasures of grace lavished on them ? They returned exulting with joy and glowing with gratitude, bearing away the riches of heaven's gifts, and proclaiming the wonders they had heard and witnessed.

Let us go to God with great simplicity, and laying aside deep reasoning, studied discourses, and methodical forms, let our heart pour forth the untaught eloquence of its native feelings: if that voice fail, if we are cold and insensible, let us lament that insensibility, affectionately complaining of it to the God who reads our souls, and speaking by our very silence. It is not the words or the specific acts used at prayer that attract the gracious attention of our Maker; it is the intention; the feelings; the interior preparation. The best prayer is that accompanied rather by peace and recollection than by great activity and violent exertion; that in which the soul calmly presents herself before her Maker, and simply gives expression to the feelings excited not by herself but by grace. This is the most acceptable of prayers, because it is more the production of God than of our own efforts; his operations being unchecked by human ardor and eagerness, the result only of self-love.

The holy shepherds continued in prayer as long as they remained at the crib; after their departure they permanently retained the impression produced by their communication with God, and were thenceforth transformed into new men. Were they previously acquainted with prayer? Had they read treatises or studied instructions on the sacred science? Did they curiously investigate

the wonders which occurred within their souls or learnedly reason on the operations of grace? By no means. They simply offered their hearts to their infant Saviour; they allowed him the free exercise of his divine action over them; they merely co-operated in that action, not restraining or opposing it by their own activity, by their reflections or, in short, by any reference to self. At that moment they ceased to have any dominion over themselves, and Jesus disposed absolutely and without control of all the powers and faculties of their docile spirits. If we enter into the dispositions of the shepherds Jesus will pray in us, as he did in them. Our mistake is that we aspire to pray by our own efforts or, at least, that we expect God will form the spirit of prayer within us, according to our own ideas and desires.

CHAPTER VIII.

CANTICLE OF THE ANGELS AT THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

AFTER the angel had announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds, a multitude of the heavenly host joined the celestial messenger in proclaiming the praises of the Lord, and saying "Glory to God in the highest: and on earth

peace to men of good will" (St. Luke ii. 14). It will be useful to enter into some explanation of this sublime canticle, which refers so immediately to Jesus Christ and is so replete with practical instructions on the interior life.

We shall not now examine whether the angels glorified God through Jesus Christ alone, and whether they owed their happiness only to the Man-God, whom they recognized and adored in the mystery of the Incarnation; so far is certain, that God neither did nor would receive glory from man except through Jesus Christ. From the very commencement of the world the foundation of the true religion was no other than faith in Jesus Christ, expected as the future Liberator of the human race.

While yet a captive in his mother's womb Jesus glorified God in his own name and ours, but the operations of his divine soul were then known only to himself and his eternal Father. His devotion was at that time purely interior, and not manifested by any outward sign. At his birth it was that he first paid public and solemn homage to the Deity; at his birth, also, it was that the angels sang, "Glory be to God on high!" This canticle the infant Jesus both pronounced in his heart and externally illustrated by his actual condition. In uniting himself to human nature he assumed the form of a servant, and by this

humiliation he gave great glory to God, as also by the state of poverty, obscurity, suffering, sorrow and desolation which he voluntarily embraced. The eternal Father beheld in the crib of Bethlehem a God immolated as a victim for the reparation of the glory of the Deity; he saw a God annihilated in the person of a Being equal to himself; that Being adored, served, obeyed him, and offered himself in "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans viii. 3) to bear the weight of divine vengeance, the terrors of which he already began to experience. The most perfect submission of all creatures could never have given equal glory to God; it could not have paid him homage adequate to his supreme greatness or indemnified him for the insult offered to his majesty by the most trivial sin.

But independently of his own personal merit, which was infinite, how did Jesus Christ principally glorify his Father? Was it by the external circumstances of his humble birth? No, but by his internal dispositions; by the unlimited devotion of his adorable heart.

While Jesus Christ gave glory to God he also offered peace to man, the same disposition on his part promoting both ends. Already he began the work of reconciliation between mortals and their Maker, levelling the wall of division which had so long stood between them. Already he

taught them by his example in what true peace consists and how it may be procured. Jesus enjoyed a calm, profound, imperturbable peace amidst the poverty, the pain, and the humiliations of his birth. The peace of man is not then attached to pleasures, wealth or honors; on the contrary, he will find those transitory treasures a source of ceaseless anxiety and annoyance, whether he actually possesses or only pants for the attainment of them. Neither are the miseries of this life an obstacle to peace; the heart may be happy though sunk in abjection and indigence. To-day Jesus reveals this hitherto undiscovered secret. But to whom does he reveal it? To whom does he offer peace? "To men of good will." In this good will, in fact, it is that peace consists. And what is a man of good will? One whose will is subject to the will of God; one whose will submits through love to the designs of God; one who cheerfully accepts all that God ordains, convinced that the supreme wisdom of the Creator fully understands the real interests of the creature. Such was the disposition of Jesus Christ. At each different event of his birth he interiorly exclaimed "O my God! I have desired it," because thou hast willed it, "and thy law is in the midst of my heart" (Ps. xxxix. 9). His humanity was in a state of suffering, but he rejoiced to suffer, and he was

rendered happy amidst his pains by his intimate union with God.

The interior life establishes the soul in the disposition of Jesus Christ, allowing, of course, for the necessary disproportion. It unites her to God and subjects her in all things to his holy will; thus it glorifies the Almighty and brings peace to man. Without submission to the adorable will of our Maker we cannot glorify God nor enjoy peace. If you desire to be happy seek above all other things the promotion of God's glory. If you wish to glorify God as perfectly as he requires and expects have no will but his. We oppose our own happiness when we fail to refer all our views and intentions to the glory of God; we interfere, on the other hand, with the glory of God when we refuse perfect submission to his will. Let us firmly impress on our minds two important truths: first, that in whatever condition God may be pleased to place us, whether as regards internal feelings or external circumstances, his only object is his own glory and our happiness; secondly, that by willingly accepting this condition we promote his glory and insure our peace. With the help of that grace which never fails it is always in our power to submit voluntarily to the arrangements of his providence. We shall, of course, suffer; for this we must be prepared; we shall experience violent

internal struggles, and nature will not yield its life without loud clamor and violent resistance. But, if the soul relax in nothing from her first determination, this involuntary tumult will prove no obstacle either to God's glory or her own peace. These clear and simple principles should be the rule of our judgment and the guide of our conduct.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS CHRIST.

"AFTER eight days were accomplished that the Child should be circumcised, his name was called Jesus—which was called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (St. Luke ii. 21). In these few simple words is one of the great mysteries of the life of Jesus announced to man. The fact alone is mentioned; the rest is left to our own reflections. Such is the style adopted on all occasions by the holy Evangelists; they narrate the marvellous works of divine power with a brevity, an unadorned simplicity, persuasive and convincing beyond all the force of human eloquence. A little reflection on the subject must convince us that the Spirit of God alone could guide the pen which traced such words, and that the Gospel is no less supernatural in its

style than in its substance. It does not contain one line to which this observation may not be applied. We shall proceed to develop the ample instruction comprised in these few words, first endeavoring to impress our minds with the conviction that only the Spirit which dictated the Gospel can enable us to penetrate its meaning.

What was circumcision? Who is He who now subjects himself to this ceremony? Was he obliged to submit to it? What obligation did he contract by so doing? What connection is there between the ceremony of circumcision and the name Jesus given to our Redeemer? What is the new circumcision which he comes to establish on the ruins of the old? So many difficulties which must be cleared up preparatory to our understanding either this great mystery or that of the interior life, of which Jesus is the one only model.

Circumcision was the external symbol of the covenant established between the Almighty and the descendants of Abraham. That holy patriarch was the first who became subject to it, and so rigorous was the law which enjoined it that any of the sons of Israel on whom this mark was not impressed were condemned to be exterminated from amidst the chosen people. God had selected this sign to recall to the Jews that original iniquity which, being stamped on the

spirit of each at his birth, was to be transmitted by him to his posterity. Perhaps the pardon of original sin was attached to this ceremony, accompanied by the faith of the child's parents in the future Redeemer. It was a mark of their dependence on God, a symbol of servitude similar to that which masters usually imprinted on the bodies of their slaves. It was a ceremony attended still more by humiliation than corporal pain, for being the acknowledgment of a double slavery, that of nature and that of sin, it could not fail to produce a sense of degradation and consequent confusion.

Is it not strange that a God should have submitted to the circumcision of that flesh he had voluntarily assumed? Was not his incarnation a sufficient humiliation in itself? Was it necessary to add the semblance of a sinner to the form of a slave? Other infants did not voluntarily submit to the ceremony; they were sensible only to the pain inflicted, while Jesus clearly saw and freely accepted both its pain and its ignominy.

Was Christ obliged to submit to the law of circumcision? Certainly not, if we consider the infinite dignity of his divine person, the sanctity of his soul, and the ineffable purity of his conception. Although descended from Abraham according to the flesh, yet before Abraham was

he existed ; for from eternity he is God, one with his Father and equal to him. In this point of view he enjoys absolute independence and shares in the sovereign dominion of God over all creatures, for by him were all things made. But inferior to God in his humanity, he joyfully recognized as man the authority of his Father ; he presented him the homage of the most perfect and unqualified dependence, and freely offered his sacred flesh to receive the external mark of that subjection. In like manner his soul was holy and impeccable in virtue of the hypostatical union ; his body as the body of the Word, and formed by the operation of the Holy Ghost, was essentially free from every stain. But he remembered that he had assumed human nature only to become the representative and the Redeemer of sinners ; therefore, though incapable of sin, he determined at least to impress on his sacred flesh its degrading mark, thereby proclaiming his intention of becoming a victim for its expiation. In this point of view he was more strictly obliged than any other Jew to submit to the law of circumcision, not in his own name, but in ours. He voluntarily engaged, in the first place, to fulfil the whole law, thereby embracing in its fullest extent the obligation which St. Paul expressly declares to be the great end of circumcision. Yet that law was not binding in his regard ; it did not even

remotely refer to him, for he was the Divine Legislator from whom it first emanated, in which capacity he was empowered to annul it at pleasure, and, moreover, he had instituted it merely as a type of the new law which he was now about to substitute for the former dispensation. In the second place, he engaged to pour out on a future day the last drop of that blood which at his circumcision he first began to shed for the expiation of sin. One single drop of that precious blood would have sufficed, it is true, to redeem the universe; but though fully proportioned to the debts of man, that seemingly limited manifestation of his love would not have satisfied the unbounded charity of our merciful Redeemer for his creatures. Finally, he engaged at his circumcision to submit without resistance to the absolute dominion of his eternal Father and to satisfy even in their utmost rigor the claims of divine justice. Such were the feelings which occupied the heart of Jesus during the ceremony of his circumcision. Externally he bore it like other children, manifesting his sense of the pain inflicted by tears and sobs, but internally his spirit was filled with joy and his heart consumed with an ardent desire to suffer still more.

As the imposition of the child's name accompanied the ceremony of Jewish circumcision the infant God received on this occasion the name of

Jesus, a name not selected for him by men but appointed by heaven itself. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus," said the angel, first to Mary and afterwards to Joseph. The connection between this sacred name and the ceremony of circumcision is obvious: *Jesus* signifies a *Saviour*, and by the very fact of receiving circumcision the holy Child began the great work for which he had come from heaven, and which was to be finally consummated on the cross. The sacrifice by which he commenced the work of redemption was in itself sufficient for its accomplishment. Never was a name better applied nor more strictly merited, since, in fact, Jesus Christ purchased his right to it with his blood at the very moment of its being imposed, and from that instant to the last sigh of his mortal life all his exertions were directed to the perfect fulfilment of the duties included in its mysterious signification. How generous the Saviour who sheds his young blood and weeps his infant tears beneath the knife of circumcision only to anticipate the future agonies which will terminate his human career on the cross of shame! How great the mercy which delivers man from the degrading thralldom of sin and the eternal torments of hell! How ineffable the love which insures to him the everlasting possession of the sovereign Good! Others had borne the name of Jesus before, but

had it ever cost its possessors what it cost the Redeemer? Had it ever purchased equal blessings for man?

One of the many wonders included in this mystery is, that Jesus Christ should have submitted to a law he came to abrogate, a law which he actually did abrogate by the very fact of submitting to it, for instead of external circumcision he submitted the circumcision of the heart, and proposed it to all who, as Christians, should afterwards bear his sacred name. The circumcision of the heart he practised in an eminent degree of perfection while his immaculate flesh quivered under the knife of the law. It is true no vicious tendency could be retrenched from that adorable heart, the sanctuary of all purity, but great sacrifices awaited the Redeemer of man, and he offered himself to endure them in anticipation; exterior and interior trials confronted him, and he courageously resolved to meet them. His circumcision was in itself a trial proportioned to his tender age and the weakness of his infant frame.

The great end of the Christian code is the circumcision of the heart; to this object does all else bear reference. It is necessary for the justification of the sinner, and necessary also for the perseverance of the just. It is the only road to sanctity, but a road so lengthened as daily and

hourly to afford new room for further progress. To retrench from the heart every incentive to evil is in itself a painful and protracted task; to eradicate every obstacle to the undisturbed sway of virtue is one still more abundantly fraught with difficulty. In order to understand the full extent of the great work, as well as the nature of the efforts necessary to its success, it is indispensably requisite to have courageously undertaken it. The literal obligations imposed by spiritual circumcision are most rigorous; to insure our salvation as far as is in our power the severing knife must be plunged deeply into the spirit. But with souls who, aspiring to perfection, are resolved to place no limitation to their practice of virtue, to offer no resistance to the absolute dominion of grace, no opposition to any sacrifice required by divine love, the case is altogether different. Those alone who have gone through the ordeal can tell the anguish of that interior circumcision which pursues self-love into its most secret intrenchments, and with unsparing severity lays it prostrate whenever it attempts to raise its head. Yet the soul which feels herself destined to experience the refined rigors of interior circumcision should not be alarmed or cast down. Were it necessary to become her own executioner she might shrink tremblingly from the terrific prospect. But it is

her heavenly Father who holds the knife ; it is he who guides the incision and imparts strength to endure its severity. His hand is as skilful as his heart is tender, and never will he inflict any suffering but with a view to our own advantage. Abandon yourself with entire confidence to his love, and while his paternal arm directs the progress of the crucifying operation keep your eyes steadily fixed on Christ, that the view of his example may animate and console you under your trials and sorrows.

CHAPTER X.

JESUS CALLS THE WISE MEN TO BETHLEHEM.

(*St. Matt. ii. 1-12.*)

THAT the end of Christ's heavenly mission was the salvation of the whole human race he manifested even at his birth, calling to his cradle the Jews, in the person of the shepherds, and the Gentiles in that of the sages. The shepherds were poor, illiterate beings ; the Magi, on the contrary, were learned men, and, according to the common tradition, held the high dignity of kings ; thus with the Lord there is no distinction of nation, of rank, of natural talents or external gifts. The incarnate Word, though immeasurably elevated above the noblest of the sons of

men, stoops with willing condescension to the last and meanest of creatures; he knows how to humble the pride of the one and to arouse the drooping confidence of the other.

We do not so often meet instances of entire devotion to God's service among the rich and learned as among the poor and untaught; the former have far greater difficulties to encounter, and more serious obstacles to surmount in the path of perfection; yet, when grace does perfectly triumph over their hearts, the conquest is certainly more glorious to God; piety in them is more solid and virtue more perfect. To preserve unsullied purity amidst continual incentives to the contrary vice; to love and practise humility at the summit of earthly dignity; to be temperate, nay, mortified even, in the bosom of affluence and luxury; to sink in our own eyes in proportion as we are esteemed by others, referring to God alone the glory which redounds to us from natural endowments and intellectual gifts—this is something more admirable than would be the possession of the same virtues in a sphere of life where less difficulty attends their acquisition and preservation. If the infant Jesus exulted at beholding the wise men prostrate at his feet, and derived peculiar satisfaction from their adoring homage, it was not because their condition was exalted in a worldly sense, but because

that faith must have been strong indeed which could recognize and worship the Lord of heaven under the form of a poor and desolate child.

It is a mistake to suppose that the interior life is incompatible with the condition of persons distinguished for birth, dignity, or intellectual endowments. Grace speaks to every heart that is willing to hear its voice; its bright light can easily dispel the prejudice which so generally exists in favor of noble birth; its powerful influence can detach the soul from the love of wealth and inspire profound contempt for those vain honors which vanish like the vapor of the morning. The richly gifted and highly cultivated mind is, in fact, the one fittest to comprehend the sublimity and to feel the beauty of the Gospel morality.

There is a striking analogy between the vocation of the wise men and the call of the soul to a spiritual life. A strange meteor attracted the attention of the Magi, who, having by some means ascertained the expected coming of the King of Israel, connected the appearance of the wonderful star in the heavens with that of the Saviour on earth. When God destines a soul for the interior life he usually prepares her for his designs by imparting certain lights, and suggesting certain reflections of which she does not at first comprehend the object. She is struck by a book she

chances to meet ; by a conversation she hears ; by an example she witnesses ; as yet there is nothing very marked or definite in the impressions they produce. At last the decisive moment comes ; the light of heaven beams on her and reveals the perfection to which she is called ; the road leading to it opens on her view ; the sweet attractions of divine grace beckon her on ; a holy ardor to which she has hitherto been a stranger impels her forward ; all that she has previously heard, read, and felt recurs to her mind, and in an instant the designs of God are made manifest.

As soon as the Magi had learned the birth of the King of the Jews they unhesitatingly quitted their homes and undertook a long journey to come and adore him. Such also is the conduct of a soul faithful to the heavenly call. God has spoken, and her resolution is taken ; no human attachment, no earthly consideration, no possible obstacle can arrest her ; cheerfully and joyfully she renounces all things to follow the voice which summons her onward. Her heart tells her that in God she will find immeasurably more than she has sacrificed to attain the possession of him.

Scarcely had the Magi set out on their way to Jerusalem when the star they had seen in their own land disappeared. Here was a great trial of their faith, but they bore it generously. Extraor-

dinary light was not necessary for their guidance ; the ordinary resources of travellers were within their reach, and by recurring to them they safely reached their journey's end. At the commencement of the spiritual life light and consolation are lavished in abundance ; the soul enjoys sweet peace and undisturbed security ; she has no doubt of her love for God, for she feels that it has been made very evident by solid proofs ; neither does she doubt of God's love for her, of which she has had equally convincing manifestations. She treads the path of perfection with a firm and steady step ; she is encouraged by the visible rapidity of her progress, and in her abundance she says with David, " I shall not be moved."

Without such encouragement she would not have resolution to plunge into the unknown way. But when she has advanced somewhat on the journey the Almighty hides his presence ; the light which shone so clearly becomes gradually clouded, and soon the obscurity of faith envelopes her in darkness. She no longer feels that sensible, affectionate love for her heavenly Spouse which had been the source of so many sweet emotions, nor does she now so often receive the once-frequent testimonies of God's tenderness for her. Does she love him less in fact ? or has his love for her really cooled ? No, certainly. Hitherto God's love for her was tender ; now it

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is strong. Hers was lively and ardent; now it is active and generous. But she is not left without a guide amidst the darkness; and now, more than ever, she feels the necessity of confiding in that guide, of believing his words, and following his directions. She cannot see her progress, and, were it not for his assurance to the contrary, she would feel convinced of having lost her way. She is overpowered by the weariness of the journey, and has no means of judging for herself whether she advances or not. Her only security is in obedience to her director, under whose conduct she will surely and safely reach the holy city of Jerusalem. •

Undeterred by human respect, the wise men inquired on their arrival at Jerusalem where they should find the new-born King of the Jews. We may easily imagine the answer they received from its inhabitants, utterly ignorant as they were of the birth of Jesus Christ. Strangers, it was, who announced to God's favored people the event so closely connected with their dearest interests; strangers who aroused their slumbering spirits, and revived their almost forgotten expectation of the Messiah, whose coming was actually looked for about that time. Herod, on learning the object of the sages' journey, was troubled, and all the city with him. He assembled the chief priests and the doctors of the nation, and inquired of them where

Christ was to be born. In conformity with the prophecies, they replied in Bethlehem of Juda; on which he secretly summoned the wise men and sent them to Bethlehem, with orders to make diligent search for the Child, and, after they should have found him, to communicate the joyful tidings, that he too might go and adore him (St. Matt. ii. 8). Thus did the ambitious and crafty prince conceal his trembling apprehension and draw over his dark designs the veil of religion.

Among many other difficulties, the spiritual life is exposed to severe trials from creatures. As long as men are ignorant of that holy secret, which of her own accord she should never reveal, the interior soul is left in peace. But sometimes it pleases God to manifest her state, and then it is that she must prepare for grievous trial; that she must arm herself with courage and intrepidity to resist persecution, as well as with prudence to avoid the snares laid for her destruction. If questioned by lawful authority she must boldly declare all that God has wrought in her, and neither blush at her state nor indulge disquietude as to what will be thought of her or what will happen in her regard. Prejudice, envy, ignorance, malice, and pride will array themselves against her; she will be condemned and despised; she will be pronounced a hypocrite, or at best an imaginary enthusiast; she

will be humbled; she will be strongly urged to withdraw from the path into which the will of God has led her. But let her resolutely persevere in her first determination, and courageously embrace her trials, and infallibly the Almighty will draw his own glory from her abjection by confounding the malice of some, removing the prejudice of others, and displaying in strong colors his marked and visible protection over all who abandon themselves to his almighty providence.

As soon as the Magi had been informed by the wise men of the Jewish nation of the place where, according to the predictions of the prophets Jesus Christ was to appear in human form they departed without hesitation for Bethlehem, and soon their hearts were gladdened by the reappearance of the friendly star, which preceded them on their way, and stopped not again until it rested over the dwelling of the divine Infant. The investigations to which the interior soul is subjected commonly tend to encourage her, by leading to a clearer and more precise knowledge of her real state, provided always she places her reliance on God and never on her own lights or discernment. She has, in fact, only herself to dread; for no insidious question, no captious argument, no unfavorable decision can shake her confidence so long as she imposes

silence on her own reflections. She will pursue her path in peace, and approach more and more nearly, as well as more securely to Jesus Christ. God himself will dispel the clouds which, by his permission, have long lowered over her; he will encompass her with strong and steady light; and in its brightness she will safely attain to him whom she has sought so ardently and so perseveringly. How will she overflow with rapturous joy when the long-obsured vision of his glory bursts on her anew; when she finds herself on the very threshold of that mysterious gate which she believed so remote? Had not her faith been severely tried she could not now lay claim to the surpassing bliss which rewards her fidelity. Had the star accompanied the Magi throughout their journey they would have had no merit in following its guidance, nor would they have experienced the inexpressible comfort afforded by its reappearance.

They entered the house indicated by the position of the star, and having there found the divine Infant, with Mary, his holy mother, they prostrated before the Man-God, adored him, opened their treasures, and offered him gold, frankincense, and myrrh, recognizing by these mysterious gifts his divine and human nature as well as his regal dignity.

Beatific union with God is reserved for the

abode of eternal glory ; but even on earth interior souls, long accustomed to pursue the path of perfection, may contract with their heavenly Spouse a union whose ineffable bliss is reserved to themselves alone. Then are they amply indemnified for their past and present sufferings, and experimentally convinced that to lose all for God is in fact to gain all. In finding Jesus they likewise find the ever-blessed Virgin Mary, who is inseparable from him, and the Son instils into their hearts a share in his own feelings for his dear and cherished mother. Annihilated in heart and mind, they adore Jesus Christ with dispositions similar to those of the Man-God in adoring his Father, and they offer him the gold of charity, the incense of prayer, all ardent with the fire of divine love, and the myrrh of interior and exterior mortification.

Being supernaturally warned in sleep not to return to Herod, the wise men returned by another way to their own country, and thus eluded the crafty designs of the wily politician. Though the Evangelist does not mention the fact, we may be assured they became zealous apostles of Christ, loudly proclaiming the favor which the Lord had done them, and publishing the wonders they had witnessed. When interior souls have passed the extreme of tribulation and attained intimate union with God, the Almighty

ordinarily employs them as instruments in gaining souls to him and leading many into the way of perfection. They return to the world from which they had previously been estranged, but they re-enter by a different path from that which had led them away. They have no intercourse with their fellow-creatures except with the view of leading them to God, and that intercourse, while it benefits others, does not prejudice themselves; their spirit of retirement, their recollection in prayer, their peace of soul, their union with God are in no degree impaired in consequence. But let them beware of undertaking such a mission on the impulse of their own will and judgment; let them proceed only under the command of God, and calmly wait until events regulated by divine Providence shall manifest to them the souls they are destined to assist. They will then incur no danger from developing, according to circumstances, the favors God has done them, the helps he has granted them in their temptations and trials, and the means which have led them safely through the perilous road whence they have just emerged. Their intention being pure, they will not be exposed to vanity by verbal or written disclosures of this nature, which will tend only to glorify God, to edify their neighbor, and to merit for themselves a rich reward.

CHAPTER XI.

PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE.

(*St. Luke ii. 22-36.*)

FROM the narrative of the Evangelist, it would appear that Jesus was carried to the temple and presented to God like any ordinary child, concurring passively in the will of his parents, but having no further part in the ceremony; yet, in fact, it was he who directed the conduct of Mary and Joseph, secretly inspiring them how to act on this occasion and all others in which he was concerned.

The law ordained that the first-born of men and beasts should be offered to the God of Israel in acknowledgment of his supreme dominion, as also in memory of the Jews' deliverance from the sword of the exterminating angel which slew the eldest son of every family in Egypt. This law could have no connection with Jesus Christ, who, as the Son of God, shared the sovereign empire of his Father over all nature; even as man, he was exempt from it, not having been conceived or born in the ordinary way. Moreover, having been himself the great actor in the work of divine vengeance over the Egyptians, he needed no memorial to recall that manifesta-

tion of his own power. Besides, what will men think of him if he thus mingles indiscriminately with the crowd? How can they recognize him for the Messiah unless he proves himself superior to the rest of the children of earth by proclaiming his exemption from the common law?

These difficulties, so self-evident and, to human pride, so insuperable, did not deter our Redeemer from submitting to the law, and from combining with the exact observance of its external form the most perfect internal dispositions. He humbled himself profoundly before his Father; he acknowledged him to be the supreme arbiter of life and death in his own regard; he consecrated his being anew to the divine service, and devoted himself once again to the accomplishment of the eternal will.

A reflection of extreme importance here suggests itself. Christ devoted himself to his Father, not in his own name alone but in ours also; he consecrated all Christians to God, in unison with his own oblation, so that the Lord Jesus recognizes us for his only in as far as we ratify the consecration he has already made of us. This act of consecration was unlimited in its nature, both as it embraced Jesus Christ and his followers; therefore it deprives man of all right to the disposal of himself; it forbids that we seek ourselves in anything, or look to ourselves as our

last end. We must freely submit to the dominion of God at all times and in all circumstances, in interior dispensations and exterior events; and the accomplishment of his holy will, to which is attached the promotion of his glory, must ever be our principal end.

Let us seriously examine whether we have thus consecrated ourselves to God, not in word only but in deed, and if at all times and in all events we act in conformity with this rule. Alas! we shall find our practice sadly at variance with our obligations; we shall see that in a multitude of cases we assume dominion over ourselves, our thoughts, affections, and projects. Where no manifest sin is entailed we imagine we can at pleasure grant or refuse to God what he requires; and too frequently we look far less to the fulfilment of his will than to the gratification of our own, as if the dominion of God—a dominion all of love—the dominion of a father over his children, were to be circumscribed by the fear of offending him, and that the desire of pleasing him were to have no influence on our submission and obedience. The true child of God will faithfully attend to the commands and prohibitions of his heavenly Father; he will labor, it is true, to attain promised rewards and to avoid threatened punishment, yet, at the same time, his principal solicitude will be to discover the will of God, and

his most diligent study to fulfil it. Such was the nature of the oblation which Christ offered to his Father, both of himself and us ; he requires that our devotion to God be equally unlimited, otherwise it cannot perfectly please him ; the essential point will be wanted, the point from which most glory will redound to him and to his Father, and most merit accrue to ourselves. But, to understand the nature of such a consecration to God, it is necessary to have an interior spirit and to be enlightened by a special grace. To resolve courageously on such devotion requires great generosity of soul ; to act in pursuance with it demands strong and unshaken courage. Until we have taken this all-important step we shall be but imperfect Christians, slaves of self-love, mercenary servants, toiling along the way of the Lord's precepts with reluctance, deterred by the most trifling obstacles and terrified by the slightest sacrifices.

The law of Moses ordained that certain animals should be offered for the ransom of the first-born of the sons of men ; the offering appointed for the poor was two doves or two pigeons, and by the sacrifice of the poor it was that the Son of God would be redeemed, for he had already embraced the extreme of poverty, with its attendant privations and humiliations. His object in permitting the payment of the redeeming price was

not to escape death, but, on the contrary, to reserve himself for a species of death the most agonizing, preceded by sacrifices of the most painful nature and humiliations of the most overwhelming kind.

O my Saviour! what lessons of virtue thou givest me even in thy tender infancy! Thou embracest every opportunity of confounding my pride, and this vice which thou detestest is the one I treat most tenderly and indulge most freely. I am never at a loss for arguments in its defence, nay, even in its justification. Thou consentest to be reputed by men for what thou art not, and I often blush to be known for what I am. Thy glory is to descend, and my aim is to ascend. Thou art never humbled to the extent thou desirest, and I am never exalted in proportion to my ambitious aspirings; yet I call myself thy disciple, while I abhor thy lessons and shun thy example. What can I think of myself when I contrast my conduct with thine, and see the contradiction which the comparison presents?

In proportion as Jesus Christ forgot his own glory to seek that of his Father alone, so did the Father delight in raising the veil and revealing the hidden glory of the Son. At Bethlehem he manifested him to the shepherds by the voice of angels and to the sages by the agency of a star. At the presentation in the temple the Holy Spirit

inspired Simeon to enter the sacred edifice at the same moment as the incarnate Word and there publicly to recognize the humble Infant for the long-expected Messiah. The venerable old man received the divine Child into his arms; he fondly caressed him, fervently adored him, then prayed that death might close in its deep slumber the favored eyes which had gazed at last on the God of his heart, the long-desired of nations. Anna, the prophetess, who had served God in the temple until extreme old age and passed her life in prayer and fasting, was likewise permitted to behold the infant Jesus, and loudly joined in praising God and speaking of the Child to all who expected the redemption of Israel. Thus did heaven multiply its testimonies to the divinity of Jesus Christ just in proportion as he seemed to avoid them. Had he been capable of seeking such evidence, would it have been granted?

To assume the appearance of humility with a covert view to our own exaltation would, doubtless, be a crime of great magnitude. It is, nevertheless, certain that God delights in exalting the humble, without prejudice to their humility. He selects them as fitting instruments for the promotion of his glory; and, after they have deeply studied the divine lesson of interior humility he came to teach, after they have proved their proficiency in that heavenly science by submitting

to the external humiliations his hand imposes, he exalts them in the eyes of men, to the end that he may himself be praised and honored in them. The study of the saints, in imitation of their divine Redeemer, is to avoid honors and to seek obscurity; their great ambition is to be condemned; their most ardent desire to be esteemed as nothing. Were the world capable of conferring lasting and solid glory they would desire no participation therein, because glory belongs to God alone, and must return in unimpaired fullness to its lawful possessor. As man even Jesus Christ himself had no right to receive glory from others; as man he never attributed anything to himself, but, on the contrary, considered his personal union with the Divinity as an additional incentive to humility. The more perfectly the soul learns to know God, the more intimately she is united to God, the more she will sink in self-annihilation; between these two points there is an essential connection. Humility is the necessary consequence and infallible test of sanctity.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

(St. Matt. ii. 13-18.)

HEROD, disappointed by the wise men, determined to wreak his vengeance on the infant Jesus, and, lest his victim should elude his grasp, he commanded a universal massacre of all children of two years old and under at Bethlehem and in the adjoining country. Jesus was well acquainted with the cruel designs of the ambitious king; he could have opposed divine power to his avenging fury, and easily provided for his own personal safety; yet he refrained from interposing his authority; he calmly left to his father the care of providing for his security, and Joseph, warned by an angel of the impending storm, fled into Egypt with the persecuted Child and mother. On this occasion Jesus differs externally in no respect from any ordinary, weak, defenceless infant, which, ignorant of impending danger and incapable of averting it, owes its deliverance solely to the foresight and tenderness of its parents. If, with anticipated knowledge of peril to our temporal interests, and even our lives, we had at our disposal the miracles of God's omnipotence would we act as Christ did on this

occasion? Instead of recurring to the miraculous interposition of divine power would we be satisfied to abandon our lot to Providence, and to oppose to danger only the ordinary means of escape? Alas! no; our virtue would be too weak for this. We should fancy that in such circumstances it was quite lawful to look to our own defence, and for that end to call on the supernatural power within our reach.

But laying aside a supposition so purely chimerical—knowing, as we do, that the saints who received the gift of miracles received it only for the benefit of others, and were never tempted to employ it for themselves—let us direct our attention to the Son of God, whom we behold fleeing from Herod, the guilty usurper of the throne of David. Why does he flee? Is it through fear? No, it is because his Father has so willed it, and because, by thus evading the pursuit of his enemies, he more perfectly conceals from men his real dignity and gives us a more striking example of humility. And whither does he flee? Into a strange idolatrous land—a land, too, which had barbarously oppressed and persecuted the Jewish nation in its infancy. Here he seeks an asylum, and here will he remain as long as it shall please his Father, quitting it only in obedience to an intimation from heaven. His already indigent parents will now sink deeper still into the abyss

of abject poverty, and he will share their destitution. Egypt will be unconscious of the heavenly Guest whose hallowed presence has blessed her, and by no prodigy or other sign will he reveal himself. How must he have suffered during this perilous journey! how deeply must he have sympathized in the alarms and anguish which, on his account, filled the heart of his loving, adoring mother! And yet he could have averted her misery had he not known that tribulation and sorrow were her great gain.

In reading this portion of the gospel we are, no doubt, filled with compassion for the desolate Son and sorrowing mother; yet Jesus asks not our compassion; he desires to be imitated, rather than pitied. Let us enter into his adorable heart and contemplate the sublime sentiments it breathes; there we shall discover total submission to the will of his eternal Father, unbounded confidence in his paternal love, perfect abandonment to divine Providence, profound peace amidst just grounds of alarm, and unspeakable joy at seeing himself the early victim of human passion and persecution.

O my Saviour! when shall we learn to think like thee? No sooner do we meet a slight contradiction than our wills rebel, our hearts are filled with disquiet and apprehension, our spirit swells with resentment, and our lips murmur

* against the injustice of those who try us. What, then, becomes of our internal peace and recollection and love of prayer? Temporal misfortunes agitate the soul, absorb her faculties, bend her energies to the earth, and if humiliation be added to their poignancy wounded pride revolts, and a torrent of indignant anger bursts forth unchecked. Is this to be a Christian? And shall those say they aim at the title of Christians who dread such trials more than death, who use every imaginable means to avert them, and know no peace during their continuance? Yet this is in reality our own case; although, strange to say, far from considering such sentiments a just subject of self-reproach we should, perhaps, deem it unreasonable that others imputed them to us as a fault, really fancying that similar dispositions can be allied with true and solid piety. The primitive Christians had widely different notions on these matters; and, if they walked in the footsteps of Christ, is it not inconsistent to say that we are walking in them too? There are many pious persons quite willing to embrace unlimited external forms of devotion, fasting, watching, austerities of all kinds; but to bear contradictions, persecutions, reverses of fortune; to submit cheerfully to poverty and humiliation for the love of Jesus Christ and from the sincere desire of being like him, this is, indeed, a rare disposi-

tion, even among the most fervent Christians, nay, among those who openly profess devotion to the interior life and prayer.

I do not expect that nature shall be mute and insensible on such occasions, but it is one thing to feel and another to indulge feeling. It is one thing, again, to give expression to natural feeling, and another to ratify that indulgence of human weakness by the consent and approval of the will. It would be a great mistake to imagine that the cross is only borne well when endured without reluctance; voluntary and involuntary repugnance should not be confounded. A sick person willingly swallows nauseous medicine although he dislikes its bitterness; and freely submits to a painful operation even while loudly manifesting his sense of its tortures. This is precisely the disposition in which God requires us to bear the trials he sends. Let the soul see in them the will of God; let her look on them as a portion of the cross of Christ, which it has fallen to her lot to carry as a pledge of his love for her and an efficacious means of testifying her love for him; in fine, as the most certain means of promoting her spiritual advantage. Let her accept them when they occur, courageously resist the workings of the imagination, renounce the involuntary repugnance she experiences, condemn the indeliberate efforts she makes to avert

them, and she may be sure that God is satisfied ; she may humbly enjoy the comfort of knowing that she has suffered as a Christian ought to suffer. In her first trials a soul not yet inured to the combat may, notwithstanding her good resolutions, display too much sensibility ; she may lean a little on the support of creatures ; she may complain of her sufferings, and enjoy the consolation derived from human sympathy. In such a case she has only to reproach herself for imperfection, humbly but not despondingly, and to hope that with God's grace she will do better on the next occasion. It is well that there should be always some drawback to our self-satisfaction in the endurance of trial, and on that account God permits for our humiliation that some real or apparent imperfection should mingle with our otherwise holy dispositions under suffering ; perhaps nothing is more calculated to inspire pride than a consciousness of fortitude and generosity in enduring the cross.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE CONSOLATIONS JESUS ENJOYED IN HIS CHILDHOOD.

IT cannot be doubted that, during the period of his childhood, Jesus Christ received the strongest marks of his heavenly Father's tender

love. Though unnoticed by the Evangelists, the fact may be inferred from the usual economy of divine Providence over souls on their entrance into the spiritual life. Its commencement is not always exempt from suffering, any more than was the early infancy of Christ, yet that suffering is always alleviated by the sweet unction of heavenly comfort. In the beginning God is prodigal of his consolations to all; how superabundantly must they then have been lavished on his only Son, in whom he beheld with complacency a divine Victim, totally consecrated to his honor and glory? Since Jesus experienced the various vicissitudes of the spiritual life, he must assuredly have passed through this, its first stage. His soul was inebriated with celestial joy; it overflowed with the ineffable happiness resulting from union with the Divinity, a happiness which only a miracle could suspend. The bliss he enjoyed unquestionably surpassed that of the beatified spirits, his soul uninterruptedly possessing the beatific vision in a degree incomparably higher than the seraphim and cherubim.

But who can explain the dispositions in which he received those divine favors? Considering himself laden with the sins of the world, which he came to expiate as if they had been his own personal guilt, how must his humility have shrunk from the consolations of heaven? Again,

how admirable was his detachment from them ! He neither desired nor appropriated them, but allowed them, as it were, to flow through his heart, without an effort to arrest their progress or prolong their duration. He served his Father from the motive of generous love alone, without any view to the consolations sometimes attached to devotion, referring the celestial favors purely to the glory of God ; restoring them to their divine Author unimpaired by any interested attachment to their sensible sweetness ; seeing in them only the will of the Most High ; equally satisfied and happy when no such marks of heaven's love were vouchsafed ; overflowing with intense gratitude for these evidences of God's tenderness, and not merely recognizing his unworthiness of them, but further acknowledging that, as the Victim of his Father's justice, he was entitled only to the utmost rigors of Almighty vengeance . And what, meanwhile, were those transient favors compared with the grace of the hypostatical union, a grace both infinite and permanent, a grace which in a manner transferred the attributes of the Divinity to human nature in the person of Christ ? But, by reason of its very infinity, this grace morally annihilated the sacred humanity of the Redeemer in a manner incomprehensible to human reason, leaving him no existence that could be called his own.

This is the example proposed to interior souls on whom it may please God to bestow his extraordinary favors. The greater those favors are the more strictly is the privileged soul obliged to aim at the perfection of her model ; God requires this, and if she disappoint his expectations she will compel him to withdraw his gifts, which in such a case can contribute neither to his glory nor to her spiritual progress. She should never desire supernatural favors, still less should she imagine that her fidelity has rendered her deserving of them ; the view of her habitual faults and, yet more, of her past transgressions should persuade her, on the contrary, of her utter unworthiness to become their object. She should receive them in the spirit of profound humility, as a gratuitous mark of God's unmerited goodness, never appropriating them ; never grieving over them when they have passed away, and never seeking to prolong their duration, as if she had power to constrain the operations of that divine " Spirit who breathes where and when he will " (St. John iii. 8). Above all, she should be disinterested in her motives, and never embrace any practices of piety and mortification with a view to obtaining these divine favors. Woe to her if the heavenly visitation becomes a subject of self-complacency, self-sufficiency, and contempt for others ! Then, indeed, would the gift of God

be perverted for her into deadly poison ! If the dew of heaven were to produce only the dangerous and subtle vice of spiritual pride, far better would it be, beyond comparison, that a single drop of it never bedewed her heart ! All supernatural favors which do not increase humility and detachment from self must necessarily be prejudicial ; they should excite the deep distrust of the receiver, for they bear the appearance of snares laid by the spirit of darkness for her destruction.

The sweet consolations of heaven were not reserved by the child Jesus to himself alone ; he imparted of his fulness to his cherished mother, and that with a profusion worthy of a heart generous and noble as his. This communication of grace was a consequence of the close union which subsisted between the Son and the parent. Mary, in like manner, shared her gifts with St. Joseph, and God derived great glory from the pure and disinterested dispositions of all. The hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were like three links of a chain which had its origin and its term in God. How close the union of Mary and Joseph ! how much more intimate, again, the union of Mary and her Son ! but how ineffable the union of Jesus and his heavenly Father ! And what did it produce ? Perfect unanimity of sentiment, an interchange of grace, and a degree of sanc-

tity proportioned to the closeness of that union.

The Almighty sometimes forms a spiritual alliance between two interior souls, each of whom receives the graces of heaven, not for her own advantage alone, but that a mutual communication of the divine treasure may lead to their mutual benefit—the progress of both depending on the faithful correspondence of each. Connections of this kind, formed by and founded on grace, are rare; but when God destines their existence he makes known his will to that effect in a most marked and distinct manner. Souls who have experienced this truth understand the holy secret, but, as God has reserved the revelation of it to himself, it would be at best imprudent that human lips should divulge it. Such a union is clearly subject to certain rules, which it is of the last importance to observe inviolably. It generally subsists between a soul already far advanced in the way of perfection and another which has but just entered on the path. The former feels impelled to pray for the latter, and she does so with an ardor, a perseverance, and a constancy of which only the Spirit of God can be the source. Vainly does she endeavor, in the fear of illusion, to divert her thoughts into another channel; she is perpetually recalled to the one engrossing subject, and that until the object of

her prayer has at last yielded to the impressions of divine grace. This point being accomplished, the latter is interiorly urged to seek the direction of the former; she opens her heart with unreserved confidence to her new guide, determined to submit implicitly to his judgment and to obey his directions as she would obey God himself. The spiritual joys and sorrows of these two souls are henceforth identified; God conducts them, not separately, but together, and at the same rate of speed. If, in consequence of any marked and persevering infidelity, one of the two lingered behind the union would be dissolved and the ungenerous soul left to herself. For example, if the person directed withheld her confidence from her guide, if she followed the dictates of her own judgment, if on certain occasions she adhered to her own will or refused to obey, such infidelities would suffice to break the tie which God had formed with no other view than to maintain her in complete dependence and subjection. The same result would follow if the soul which had received the directing grace were deficient in zeal, in solicitude, or affection; if she rendered herself undeserving of the special light necessary to the faithful discharge of the trust imposed; if, instead of consulting God on all occasions, she acted by the impulse of her own will and followed her own notions—in a

word, if, on either or both sides, direction were in the least degree influenced by human and natural views; if either party refused submission to Divine grace, a submission which should be marked by perfect unanimity; if the work of God were carried on otherwise than in strict conformity with his designs, the connection between these two souls would be dissolved or, if continued, would produce no fruit; or, still worse, the spirit of evil would pervert it to his own ends by counterfeiting the operations of grace, in which case it would become a prolific source of temptation, illusion, and sin.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIFE OF JESUS AT NAZARETH.

EXTERNALLY Jesus Christ differed in no respect from other children of his age, nor did he miraculously anticipate the period when ordinary beings begin to walk, to speak, and to give evidences of dawning reason. The development of his corporal and mental faculties seemed in him, as in other mortals, to follow the progress of years. It is, then, true to assert that the God of all power was subjected to the extreme of helpless weakness; that the eternal Word of the Father was reduced to the incapability of

expressing his thoughts or wishes in human language, and that the increated Wisdom apparently shrouded the light of reason beneath the veil of infantile ignorance and blindness. Mary and Joseph alone understood the divine secret, unknown to all beside them. No movement on the part of the holy Child, no word on that of his parents, tended even partially to disclose the mystery of humility. Such was the ordinance of God, who reserved to himself the disposal of all those events connected with the manifestation of his adorable Son.

The Evangelist merely observes that "the Child grew, and waxed strong, full of wisdom; and the grace of God was in him." And again, that "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men" (St. Luke ii. 40, 52). These words evidently signify that, although the Son of God at all times possessed in himself the plenitude of wisdom and grace, he yet was pleased to give but gradual external indications of both, regulating his words and actions exactly according to the degree of intelligence and strength naturally attached to his years, and seeking only to edify, not to attract admiration or applause.

An important lesson is here presented to those on whom God bestows extraordinary supernatural gifts. The duty of souls thus favored is to

conceal the heavenly treasure with care—never to exhibit it, never to hint at the possession of it, except to persons whose position authorizes the revelation. Such silence is not less obligatory for their directors than for themselves; and should silly vanity lead to a breach of it the fault, from whichever side it proceeds, cannot fail to entail serious consequences. When God has taken possession of a soul to him alone it belongs to disclose these mysterious secrets for his own glory at the time appointed and to the persons destined. Jesus Christ never sought by word or act of his own to anticipate the period of his manifestation to the world, but calmly awaited the moment marked out by his heavenly Father. None knew who he was but those whose position entitled them to the knowledge; moreover, the information imparted to them was conveyed supernaturally, and only in the measure necessary for the accomplishment of God's designs; and thus it happened that many important matters, such as the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning our Redeemer, were clearly understood only after his death. And why? Because a premature disclosure would have impeded the fulfilment of the eternal counsels and prevented the accomplishment of man's redemption in the manner appointed. For, says St. Paul, "if they had known

it, the Jews would never have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii. 8). Neither would the infernal spirits have urged them on to destroy him whose death was destined to overturn their empire.

Though the designs of God on certain chosen souls are in no way comparable to his exalted views in the mystery of the incarnation they are, nevertheless, most important in themselves and infinitely worthy of veneration, being, in fact, the consequence and the application of that adorable mystery. The same eternal mind which has formed those designs must then necessarily guide their accomplishment, and in the means employed to that effect all must second the Almighty and no obstacle oppose him, particularly on the part of those whom he has designed to choose for his co-operators. The progress of events must be so regulated that they shall lead to the end appointed, and that in the manner God has ordained; this his supreme will he invariably conceals until the destined result has been made apparent. Perfect dependence on grace and profound silence are the interior and exterior dispositions requisite for preventing any interruption in the connection between causes and effects.

It is not to be inferred from this that we are ever dispensed the obligation of edifying our

neighbor, but merely that the nature of the edification required is not to be at our own option. To grace it belongs to regulate our words and deeds according to its views and our progress, so that, without deviating in anything from the common order, without assuming the empty appearance of virtue, without embracing singular practices, we endeavor to conduct ourselves irreproachably and to diffuse the good odor of Jesus Christ, carefully concealing within our hearts the treasure of grace confided to us. Our exterior deportment should be ever edifying, our interior dispositions hidden from human observation. What control over nature, what death to self, what fidelity to the guidance of the Spirit of God are included in this practice!

CHAPTER XV.

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE AMONG THE DOCTORS.

(*St. Luke ii. 42-50.*)

AT the age of twelve years Jesus accompanied his parents to Jerusalem to assist at the celebration of one of the Jewish festivals. He remained there without their knowledge, and after a diligent search was “found at the end of three days, seated among the doctors in the temple, hearing them and asking them questions. And

all that heard him were astonished at his wisdom and his answers. And seeing him they wondered. And his mother said to him, Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said to them, How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the word that he spoke unto them" (St. Luke ii. 46-50).

This event in the life of Christ is fruitful in reflections applicable to the interior life. First, by thus acting independently of his parents, he seemed to deviate from the duties of the obedience he had voluntarily embraced. But it was the Spirit of God which influenced him on this occasion, as it guided his conduct in every other particular. Subject to Mary and Joseph in all else, he was dispensed from consulting their inclinations under certain peculiar circumstances, wherein he acted rather as God than man. In the spiritual life it may happen that a soul deeply imbued with the spirit of obedience is urged by grace to do some particular act without reference to her director, whose permission, if asked, would be withheld. Such cases are, however, rare, and should not be presumed on without a most marked inspiration. When occurrences of this nature are afterwards communicated to a director he should not be too hasty to

condemn, nor should he pronounce on the spirit which has guided the soul until after a mature examination. God is not subject to the ordinary laws of direction, and therefore he sometimes pleases to act directly and without a medium in the soul which belongs to him; but in such cases he never fails to manifest clearly that he is himself the instigator of conduct which to human eyes seems inconsistent with the ordinary rules of virtue. Thus he proves it to be his will that souls should never become so completely the captives of obedience as that the operations of his grace shall be thereby impeded. This principle is incontestible; but the application of it is a matter of great delicacy, and extreme care should be taken to avoid the abuses which may result from misapplication.

Secondly—By his delay in the temple Jesus Christ occasioned a severe affliction to his relatives, particularly his tender mother. It is impossible to conceive the anxiety which his disappearance occasioned the Blessed Virgin; to form a correct idea of it we should be capable of understanding the depths of her love for her divine Son. But perfect as was that love it stood in need of trial to refine its purity—to render it in a manner divine. It was requisite that she should gradually learn to love him less as her Son than as her God. The tie which

bound her to Jesus Christ was at once natural and supernatural ; it was needful that she should soar above the claims of nature and cling to him by the spirit alone. There is an immense interval of perfection between the feelings of Mary for Jesus in his childhood and for Jesus expiring in mature years on the cross. He prepared her early for the heroic sacrifice to be one day demanded of her in their last separation. In like manner the view of the Almighty in forming a spiritual union between souls is that they may be to each other a source of trial and consequent purification. He first inspires them with a mutual inclination, bringing them then into closer contact, and gradually strengthening the first favorable impression. In the progress of time he permits that reciprocal antipathy, repugnance, and finally mutual estrangement should succeed these amicable feelings, thus to divest their union of its sensible attractions and to spiritualize their affection. The end which God has in view not being at first perceptible the soul is inclined to attribute the strange vicissitudes she experiences to far other causes than the true one, just as Joseph and Mary understood not at that time the conduct of Jesus in their regard. But at last the mystery is unveiled, and the soul discovers that God's design was to perfect a union of which he had himself been the author. The

trials thus unconsciously inflicted on each other by souls so circumstanced should not discourage or alarm them; their only aim must be to submit with docility to the all-wise operations of God's spirit, who will thus purify the sentiments he has himself originally inspired.

Thirdly—Jesus appeared amidst the doctors in the temple with no other view than to make himself known to them. He listened to them, questioned them, and then answered their interrogatories with a wisdom which filled them with astonishment. It cannot be doubted that the principal topic discussed on this occasion was the Messiah and the prophecies relating to him. It would have been only natural that the doctors should make inquiries concerning the wonderful Child, who displayed a degree of knowledge and prudence so far above his years. By following up these inquiries they would have discovered the circumstances attendant on his birth, and thus recognized in him the long-expected Messiah. But they neglected to satisfy so laudable a curiosity, and closed their eyes against the heavenly ray vouchsafed them. So it is with us. We sometimes encounter saintly persons whose words of holiness and wisdom produce a strong impression on our hearts. If we took the trouble of inquiring who those persons are, what kind of life they lead, what means they

have employed to obtain the heavenly knowledge which excites our wondering admiration, we should end by recognizing in them the gift of God, by disclosing to them the secrets of our souls, and regulating our spiritual concerns by their counsels; perhaps the result of all might be our own sanctification. The greater number of those who lead an interior life owe their happiness to interviews of this nature, which the providence of God expressly provided for them. But, alas, to how many has the same grace been offered in vain?

Fourthly—By his answer to Mary and Joseph Jesus teaches Christians that their great affair on earth is to attend to the interests of their heavenly Father's glory; that to promote that glory they must renounce natural ties and sacrifice, if necessary, the most tender as well as the most lawful of their heart's affections. When the glory of God requires it they must quit their parents, resist the efforts of parental love to recall them from the path to which God calls, and steel their hearts against the reproaches of human tenderness. But here again extreme prudence and discretion are requisite, for parents represent God and are invested with his authority; therefore nothing can justify a child in outstepping the limits of the most perfect and entire submission unless there be a

moral certainty that God requires it, and that to adhere to the ordinary rules would be to displease him. And even then filial piety obliges the child to study and spare the parent's feelings as far as possibly can be done. It sometimes happens that parents oppose their children's inclination for the interior life and restrain their ardor for religious exercises. In all cases which do not involve sin the duty of children is to submit to their parents' will, and they may be well assured that such submission can never prove an obstacle to their progress in perfection. In religious communities the same line of conduct should be pursued with regard to superiors. It is certain that the power of parents and superiors can never reach the soul; they can neither arrest nor retard the operations of grace, and if, by obedience to their will, any loss be incurred in one way God will amply indemnify his servants in another. It is allowable, and even obligatory, firmly to resist the opposition of parents on one point, viz., the heavenly call which summons the child to embrace the religious state. After sufficient proofs that this vocation comes from God parents are unjust and unreasonable in opposing it; their power does not extend so far. They may employ all lawful means of ascertaining that the call is indeed the voice of God; but here their author-

ity ends. In such a case it does not infringe on the respect due to parents to say, with the Apostles, "Judge if it be just in the sight of God to hear you rather than God" (Acts iv. 19), and with Christ, our model, "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (St. Luke ii. 49). All that then remains is to trust with great confidence in God, and, if we be not at liberty to dispose of our own movements, to wait until he may be pleased to effect an alteration in the determination of those to whom we are subject. With patience and great fidelity to grace matters usually sooner or later come to a favorable termination.

CHAPTER XVI.

OBEDIENCE OF JESUS TO HIS PARENTS.

AFTER his return from Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph Jesus passed nearly the whole remaining portion of his life at Nazareth, in poverty and obscurity, and the Evangelist narrates no farther details of this long period than that *he was subject* to his parents (St. Luke ii. 51). He must have considered the lesson most important in itself, as well as indispensably necessary for us, since he devoted thirty years to its practice and left us no information regarding

his private life beyond what is comprised in these few words. It is surely a lesson worthy of our most serious attention.

That Jesus as man should have been subject to his Father, to whom as God he was equal in all things, though an inconceivable humiliation to an incarnate Deity, was, nevertheless, an indispensable obligation resulting from his assumption of human nature; in fact, he had allied himself thereto only that a God might obey a God. We may infer the extent of the obedience which we as mere creatures owe to the Almighty when we consider that the Word himself, by whom all things were made, was subjected to the same obedience from the moment he became man.

Having resolved to embrace in its utmost extent the weakness and subjection of childhood, and by no exertion of his omnipotence to emancipate himself, as he could so easily have done, from that subjection, it became necessary in pursuance of this resolution that he should absolutely depend during his first helpless years on the will of his parents. His submission was purely voluntary, and therefore the more admirable in itself and the more replete with instruction for us. The example of this, his willing subjection, is doubtless well calculated to touch our hearts and confound our pride. Who that

loves Jesus Christ and desires to imitate him would refuse with such an example in view to bend beneath the yoke of obedience?

It is still more worthy of admiration that Jesus should have persevered in the practice of obedience until the age of thirty, when, according to the ordinary laws of nature, men are capable of directing themselves, as well as authorized to do so. There was no reason why Jesus should refrain at that period of his life from externally manifesting the riches of heavenly wisdom with which he was replenished; no reason why he should not assert his infinite superiority in point of prudence, grace, and sanctity, and, in consequence of that superiority, assume the command, leaving to his parents the duty of obedience. But not so. As God he contented himself with secretly inspiring the orders they imposed on him, and as man he sought only to do their will with fidelity and punctuality.

Is not this a strong and striking lesson on the value of obedience, and shall it not stimulate us to embrace it as our favorite virtue? The practice of obedience was the occupation of a God on earth, and all the details we have of his private life are comprised in these words: *he was obedient*—obedient to his heavenly Father; obedient to Mary and Joseph; obedient to all who, humanly speaking, had authority over him; obe-

dient to his enemies and his executioners when the appointed hour of their triumph came. And yet at every period of life, including even the earliest, nothing costs us so much as obedience. Scarcely is a child capable of reflection and conscious of having a will than its most strenuous efforts are to follow the impulse of that will; its strongest desire to subject all around to its tyranny. If we trace our many faults to their source we shall find them to originate principally in want of submission, either to God himself immediately or to the creatures who hold the place of God in our regard. We indignantly rebel against the most trifling opposition offered to or restraint imposed upon our will, and even when we do submit the effort is accompanied with strong interior reluctance and repining. Let us compare our sentiments and conduct in this particular with the sentiments and conduct of Jesus Christ. He was entitled, even as man, to command his fellow-men; he renounced this, his lawful right, and came, as he himself declares, "not to be served but to serve" (St. Matt. xx. 28).

How is it with us? Even when we cannot deny the existence of lawful authority we try to shake off the yoke and assert our independence. If we are invested with authority we exercise it unsparingly; and so far are we from being dis-

posed to renounce it, so far from understanding how much better it is to obey than to be obeyed, that we feel extreme satisfaction in commanding fear, respect, and submission. If we happen to be our own masters no effort is so painful as even temporarily to yield our independence, and to the very close of life no sacrifice is attended with so much difficulty in its practice.

What reasons can we allege to dispense us from obedience? Is it that we are more enlightened than those who command us? Supposing this to be the case, how shall we do away with our obligation to imitate Jesus Christ? The fullness of wisdom dwelt in him, and yet he obeyed Mary and Joseph. Is it that we have received the graces and favors of heaven in greater abundance? The effect of such favors is an increase of humility and submission, and to look on them as a dispensation from the great duty of obedience would, indeed, be to abuse them most fatally. The result of the personal union of Jesus Christ to the Divinity was to render him more perfectly obedient. Is it that we are farther advanced in the path of sanctity? Such a reason was never yet urged by any one really animated by the spirit of sanctity, nor could it occur to any mind except one blinded by pride and hypocrisy. What is our sanctity compared with that of the Holy of Holies? Whatever be our state of life

let us cherish obedience, let us love dependence, for it is the most secure road to perfection. Obedience pre-supposes the existence of almost every other virtue; it is a supplement for those in which we are deficient, and the faithful guardian of those we possess. The obedient soul has no account to render to God of her conduct; she will be justified, approved, rewarded, less for her actions than for the obedience which has animated and guided them.

But mere external compliance does not suffice to invest obedience with the quality of a real virtue in the eyes of God; to such compliance must be added the unresisting, unrepining submission of the will. The judgment also must resign its claims, and permit itself no reasoning on the nature of the command imposed. If a command be condemned by the judgment it will never be executed willingly. On the other hand, if a command be approved by the judgment, and obeyed in consequence of that approval, such submission is, in fact, obedience to one's own judgment, not to that of the superior. Jesus Christ was infallible and impeccable, yet he never opposed his will and judgment to the orders of Mary and Joseph; he obeyed with blind and entire submission, and thereby he confounded and destroyed our vain and flimsy pretexts against obedience.

Obedience embraces two principal points:

interior direction and exterior actions. With respect to exterior actions it is always more perfect to obey ; unless the command imposed involve a manifest sin, such obedience becomes obligatory to those who are bound by vow. As regards interior direction it is evident that, being incapable of judging of our own state and consequently of directing ourselves, it is indispensable that we refer the direction of our spiritual concerns to the guide whom God has appointed for us. We should make ourselves known to him with the most perfect candor and ingenuousness, and after that unhesitatingly believe his decisions as well as implicitly observe his directions. Thus we shall be secured against illusion, which is otherwise inevitable. Under the conduct of obedience we shall proceed securely, without deviating to the right or to the left ; God will not permit us to stray, but will himself supply directly for what may be wanted in his minister. In obedience we shall find strength, consolation, and support ; to this virtue are attached all the graces God destines for us. Let us then courageously resist the repugnances of nature ; let us impose silence on our judgment and cautiously guard against the snares of the tempter, whose malicious ends will be fully gained in our regard as soon as he has succeeded in exterminating the spirit of obedience from our hearts.

CHAPTER XVII.

JESUS EARNS HIS LIVELIHOOD BY THE LABOR
OF HIS HANDS.

AS soon as the child Jesus had attained sufficient strength to be employed in manual labor he began to assist St. Joseph at his trade, which, according to common tradition, was that of a carpenter. An incarnate God submitted to the law which condemned Adam to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow; he disdained not to stoop to a species of labor which in the eyes of men is mean and despicable, but, on the contrary, cheerfully devoted to it the greater portion of his life. He could easily have exempted St. Joseph from so laborious a means of subsistence, yet he would not exempt himself from it. It had been ordained in the counsels of his Eternal Father that such should be his lowly lot on earth, and he submitted to the decree not only cheerfully but joyfully, thereby accomplishing the prophecy which declared of him, "I am poor, and in labors from my youth" (Ps. lxxxvii. 16).

Labor of some description engrossed the life of each individual in the holy family at Nazareth. Mary attended to the household concerns;

Joseph provided by his trade for his own subsistence as well as that of Jesus and Mary; Jesus when sufficiently advanced in years assisted his reputed father, and in the course of time embraced as his individual portion the heaviest part of their laborious business. What a subject of contemplation does this spectacle afford! What a source of ecstatic admiration was it to the angels of God! If we behold the vision with other feelings it is because our faith is weak; because our views are widely different from the views of God. The labor pursued by the holy family was assiduous, daily, unceasing; it was the result of necessity, not of fancy or caprice; it was humble, obscure, painful, and fatiguing, leaving them scarcely leisure to recruit their strength by frugal food and interrupted repose. In a word, their condition was in every respect that of the very poorest trades-people.

Did their assiduous devotion to the laborious duties of their state exclude attention to prayer? No, assuredly. While their hands labored their minds and hearts were united to God, and that union was facilitated by the exact observance of external silence. The soul had its allotted occupation as well as the body, and far from being a mutual impediment, one served, on the contrary, as a help to the other. To suppose that the soul

of Jesus could be for one moment diverted from the remembrance of God's presence would be blasphemy; to assert it of Mary or Joseph would be inconsistent with our knowledge of their sanctity.

What are the imitators of Jesus to conclude from these truths? First, that labor is indispensable, in whatever condition of life divine Providence may have placed them. The necessity of gaining a livelihood does not impose the obligation of labor on all persons, but a necessity of a superior order most certainly does; the necessity of submitting to a penalty incurred by all men in the person of their first parent, the necessity of obeying a divine law which admits no exception, the necessity of imitating Christ, or renouncing a place among his elect. It is worthy of observation that our divine Redeemer chose for himself a description of labor the most calculated to confound human pride and indolence.

Secondly, that a Christian should blush at no occupation, however despicable in the eyes of human prejudice, unless it be also unlawful in its own nature; that, on the contrary, he has reason to rejoice if his state render him more conformable to his Saviour; but that, to perfect that conformity, he should accept in the same spirit of loving submission as his divine Model the laborious duties entailed by his condition or profes-

sion. Thirdly, that active pursuits undertaken from mere natural inclination, and continued or interrupted solely by caprice; pursuits whose only end is to pass time agreeably, to amass riches, to attain dignities, to acquire reputation, or to satisfy vain curiosity, do not enter into the order of Providence, and are neither worthy of a Christian nor meritorious of heaven. A careful self-examination, conducted on these principles, must inevitably furnish ample cause of regret and remorse.

Fourthly, that labor, in order to acquire the dignity of a virtue, must not only be lawful in its own nature, conformable to the designs of God, and pursued from a pure intention, but that it must, moreover, be accompanied by the spirit of prayer, otherwise it distracts the mind and dries up the fountain of devotion. I do not mean that meditation is a necessary appendage of labor, for this would be to require an impossibility; nor that vocal prayer should accompany active duty, for this would produce only weariness and prove in general a mere mechanical motion of the lips; what I mean is, that the Christian should ever be united to God, like his divine model Jesus Christ, by a certain attention of the mind and affection of the heart, which is, in fact, habitual prayer. Divine love alone can initiate the soul in this species of prayer, which is pursued amidst

the most distracting occupations, and is never interrupted even by close application to external duties. When the love of God has once been enkindled in the soul its activity cannot be restrained; exterior occupations, far from extinguishing, serve rather to fan the heavenly flame. The most certain means of preserving the spirit of prayer is to combine prayer and action, pursuing each alternately. A state of uninterrupted contemplation is not attainable in this life; any attempt at it would weary the mind, exhaust the body, and finally degenerate into listless idleness. Action must be succeeded by contemplation and contemplation by action, for there is no doubt that the interior life cannot long maintain its vigor unless its exercise be interrupted by exterior employment.

Spiritual people are often accused of disinclination for active exertion. This accusation is not altogether groundless in the case of certain devout souls who overload themselves with external practices of piety, or engage with imprudent ardor in a multiplicity of good works, to the detriment of their domestic duties; nor in the case again of some inert, slothful characters, who, under the pretext of applying to prayer, bury in inaction and indolence all their faculties except the imagination, which they feed on a delusive phantom of imaginary perfection. But a similar

reproach cannot be justly applied to those who really lead the life of the spirit and endeavor in all things to follow the guidance of grace. In the beginning, when prayer is accompanied with great sensible sweetness, the soul is, no doubt, tempted to prolong it at the expense of her active duties, and it may sometimes happen that human weakness yields to the attractive temptation. But soon the spirit of God discovers this to be a mere delusion of self-love, and it is renounced at once and for ever.

It may be safely advanced that the truly interior soul loves laborious pursuits; that she looks on constant occupation as a matter of strict obligation; that she turns to good account every moment of her time, and strenuously avoids both total idleness and useless occupation. Were she to desist from her active duties in the time of temptation and trial she could not long resist the enemy, action being at that time absolutely necessary to divert her thoughts from the consideration of her interior sufferings. Under corporal pain, unless it be extreme, she continues still to employ herself in a manner proportioned to her strength. Neither does the period of sensible enjoyment interrupt her pursuits; its duration is never so prolonged as fully to engross the hours appointed for the discharge of active duties, neither is its nature ever so intense as to deprive

her of the capability of attending to those duties. As a general rule, every truly interior soul loves employment; she must at all times be occupied either in mind or body, and, if the duties of her state do not fully engage her time and attention, she is careful to provide herself with additional occupation. The spirit of God urges her to this, and forbids her to lose a moment in total idleness. When inevitable circumstances compel her to lay aside her avocations the privation is to her a real mortification. What interior men were St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Francis of Sales, and yet who more diligently, more incessantly employed than they? Their voluminous writings fill us with wonder, and still this portion of their labors cannot, perhaps, be ranked as the principal. The same may be said of many persons of the weaker sex, of a St. Catharine, a St. Teresa, and several others, whose lives, although one continued prayer, were at the same time filled up with active good works of every description.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST.

(*St. Matt. iii. 13-17; St. Mark i. 9-11; St. Luke iii. 21, 22.*)

AFTER having passed thirty years in obscurity Jesus Christ began to manifest himself to the world, and the first step of his public life was an

act of the most profound humility. St. John, his holy precursor, had quitted the desert a short time previously in order to prepare the way for the approach of the world's Redeemer. He declared to the Jews that the kingdom of God was at hand, he announced to them the necessity of penance, and by a baptism of water, which was a mere external purification, he prepared them to "be baptized in the Holy Ghost and fire by Him who was to come after him, and who existed before him." Struck by the austerity of his life and impressed by the energy of his words, sinners thronged around him from all parts and received his baptism. Jesus presented himself to be baptized amidst a crowd of publicans, soldiers, and repenting sinners as if he had been one of themselves. St. John knew him well, for he had already borne testimony that he was "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world" (St. John i. 29); and now his soul shrank from the thought that the Lord of Glory should thus humble himself before his creatures. "I," said he, "ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?" And Jesus, answering, said to him, "Suffer it to be so now, for so it becometh us to fulfil all justice." O mystery of humility! What St. John considers a degradation to the Son of God the Son of God considers a duty which justice requires him

to fulfil. What, to be baptized as a sinner by a mere mortal ! by him whom He had himself sanctified in his mother's womb ! We cannot wonder at the surprise exhibited by St. John, at his reluctance to obey, at his efforts to combat the resolution of his Saviour. But in the holy struggle the humility of the Redeemer triumphed, and, through reverence for his will, the Baptist surrendered his repugnance.

Jesus was indifferent as to the public opinion likely to result from his conduct on this occasion. He did not take into account that the act might be employed as an argument against the truth of his divine mission, and construed into a proof that he who thus mingled with sinners could not be the Holy of Holies. It did not even occur to his mind that, by submitting to such a degradation, he in a manner contradicted the glorious testimony which his precursor had repeatedly given of him. He was the representative of sinners, whose debts he had engaged to pay, and, in this point of view, humiliation and annihilation were justly his due. The manifestation of his divinity was now the concern of his Father ; *his* was to glorify God by humbling himself and inspiring others with the lowest opinion of his person.

O my Saviour ! when shall we understand that thou didst stoop so low only for the love of us,

thy wretched creatures? When shall we understand that the humiliations thou didst embrace in obedience we should embrace in justice ; that, as beings formed of clay and still more as sinners, humiliation is our lawful inheritance ; and that if vanity, pride, and self-esteem are a crime in the most exalted of God's creatures they are hateful, abominable, revolting in mortals whose only appendage is ignorance, corruption, and sin? What can inspire us with humility if thy example fail to do so? Is it not evident that the entire system of Christian morality bears on humility, inculcates humility, inspires humility? To embrace interior abjection, to submit to exterior humiliation, to dread only what exalts us in our own opinion and that of others, to have no desire but for contempt, to entertain a holy ambition for it, to believe that we can never meet it in proportion to our deserts, this is the foundation, the progress, and the consummation of Christian perfection. Thus alone is God really glorified by his creatures. If we glorify him in this manner he will not fail to exalt us in turn, even in this life, if such exaltation be necessary to the fulfilment of his designs. At the very moment when Jesus Christ exhibited himself to the crowd under the appearance of a repenting sinner the Almighty proclaimed the high prerogatives of the humble Victim of sin :

“And Jesus being baptized forthwith came out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened to him; and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon him. And behold, a voice from heaven, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (St. Matthew iii. 16, 17).

What a glorious testimony to the divinity of Jesus Christ from the other persons of the adorable Trinity! Jesus foresaw this high honor, but, as man, he did not desire it; he did not humble himself with a view to receiving it; he did not rejoice at it on his own account, nor did he appropriate the glory which in the eyes of the surrounding multitude resulted to him from it. The testimony of heaven on this occasion differed much from that given of Jesus by his holy precursor at various times; it differed also from that given by Jesus of himself under certain inevitable circumstances. The difference lay in the external formality attendant on each, as well as on the impressions resulting from both. On this occasion the heavens opened, the Holy Ghost descended visibly and rested on the head of Jesus; the voice of the eternal Father proclaimed that he who had just stooped to a level with sinners was his well-beloved Son, the sovereign object of his complacency.

Once more let us lose sight of self except in

one particular—that of embracing every opportunity of practising humility, both as regards God and man. By this alone shall we be truly great before the Lord, dear to his heart, and pleasing in his eyes; and if we are not great before men, what matters it? Are they correct judges of real greatness and true merit? Sometimes we fancy that the glory of God is attached to our reputation and success, and under this impression we deem it allowable to desire the esteem of creatures and to wish for the happy issue of such enterprises as are connected with the good of religion and the salvation of souls, grieving if our exertions lead only to humiliation and contempt. How often does the vice of pride lurk under this specious appearance of pure zeal for God's glory! If you be sincere in laboring for the glory of God begin by desiring your own humiliation, by rejoicing at it, by exulting in it; and, most assuredly, that glory will be promoted by such a disposition. Abandon to his Providence the projects you have formed for his honor, and be persuaded that, whatever be the issue, his glory will result from it. If he judge it necessary to bear testimony to your pure intentions before men he will do so, not for your glory but for his own. Be careful, however, like Jesus Christ, not to desire such testimony; if you did, and that your wishes were

realized, much danger, and even detriment, would thence accrue to your spiritual interests.

CHAPTER XIX.

TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS CHRIST.

IMMEDIATELY after his baptism “Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (St. Matt. iv. 1). The connection between the circumstances here narrated is particularly worthy of observation. It was by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost that Jesus was led or, according to the expression of St. Mark, *driven* into the desert, there to be tempted by the devil. It appears strange that the Son of God should have submitted to the humiliation of being tempted by Satan; yet that temptation had been ordained by his Father, it was in obedience to his Father’s will that he endured it; and he himself, as God, willed that as man temptation should beset him. By Divine permission the fiend dared to approach that sacred soul; he dared to propose to it his infernal suggestions and to employ his most strenuous efforts to lead it to evil. He even exerted his power over the body of Jesus—that adorable body, united to the Divinity!—transporting it first to a pinnacle of the temple, and afterwards

to the summit of a lofty mountain. Had not the Gospel guaranteed the fact it would be difficult to believe it; and even believing it as we do, by the help of faith, does not the imagination revolt with astonishment from so strange a truth? Shall it now appear extraordinary to us, miserable creatures, that temptation should assail us? Shall our pride and self-love rebel because God makes use of the infernal spirit as an instrument to try us and humble us? Shall we expect to be exempted from temptation because we have devoted ourselves to God, or shall we fancy the most eminent sanctity a shield against temptation? Or again, shall we imagine ourselves forsaken by God because, for his glory and his own advantage, he permits that the enemy should urge us to evil? Let us rather prepare for and expect temptation, precisely because we are devoted to God in an especial manner. Let us look on temptation as a peculiar mark of his love. Let us embrace the humiliation attached to it after the example of Christ, and look on it as an efficacious means of promoting our sanctification provided for that end by the Holy Ghost himself.

It is in the desert that Jesus is tempted—nay, more, it is in order that he may be tempted that the Spirit has led him there. What do we learn from this? That in solitude the soul is peculiarly

liable to temptation, at least temptation of that description which God permits with the view of advancing her in perfection. Occasions of sin are constant in the world; there exterior objects, even more frequently than the devil, incite the soul to evil; and when she exposes herself to the influence of those objects, voluntarily and without reason, she may consider herself as already conquered. The enemy urges her by his wicked suggestions to brave the occasions of sin; God, on the other hand, strives by his grace to withdraw her from them. Such temptations are not then ordained by God's will, nor do they enter into the order of his Providence for her salvation. But when divine grace has led her into solitude to treat with God during some days of her spiritual interests; or when, again, she has renounced the world to embrace a life of seclusion, the temptations which ensue are directly from the enemy, who, envious of her happiness, uses every effort to impede the execution of her holy design. God has decreed that our sanctification should be the result of our struggles, and therefore he permits the combat between the soul and the spirit of darkness; he beholds with complacency our efforts and resistance; he invisibly protects, supports, and strengthens us, and our victories are, in fact, the triumphs of his grace. Let us not dread the temptations which assail us in the

desert. It is by the direction of the Holy Ghost we are exposed to them, not by the choice of our own will; therefore we may confidently expect the Divine aid under them. Let us rely on the help of God, not on our own strength, which is in fact but weakness; let us faithfully follow his inspirations, never ceasing to invoke him in the hour of peril, and infallibly we shall be gainers by the struggle.

Jesus had fasted and prayed for forty days and nights when the devil came to tempt him. He had no need thus to prepare for temptation, but he wished to point out to us the arms we must use in opposing it. Fasting, which weakens the body, and prayer, which fortifies the soul, will render us invincible; for in seclusion the devil can attack us only in two points—the concupiscence of the flesh and the pride of the spirit. Under the head of fasting are included all those external practices of penance and mortification which reduce the body to a proper state of subjection. Such practices should be regulated by prudent advice, lest the limits of discretion be exceeded and health impaired in consequence. Persons living in the world are sufficiently shielded against the temptations of the flesh by leading a temperate, regular life and avoiding all that savors of effeminacy and luxury. Those who have retired into the cloister should confine

themselves to the practices of mortification established by rule, neither omitting nor adding to them without permission. If the duration and violence of temptation require extraordinary opposition God will inspire superiors and directors with the means of resistance, and he will bless the submission of the soul to their authority. The effect of prayer, whether mental or vocal, provided it proceed from the heart, is to humble the soul, to fill it with holy distrust of self, to inspire unbounded confidence in God alone, and to banish all doubts of his goodness and his willingness to succor us. That prayer is hurtful which, instead of producing interior humiliation, nourishes pride and vain-glory; far from being the work of God, it is one of the most subtle snares of the enemy. How could it prove a shield against temptation when it is itself a most dangerous temptation? Let us carefully examine the dispositions which prayer produces in us, and only consider it an antidote against temptation in as far as it leads to humility, distrust of self, and resignation to whatever state of feeling it may please God to impart. I am never weary of insisting on this point, for humility is the touchstone of true prayer; while, on the other hand, nothing more infallibly leads to pride and illusion or more surely renders the soul the sport of imagination and self-love than

the habit of such prayer as is ill understood and worse practised.

In fine, it was previous to commencing his public career that Jesus Christ withdrew into the desert to converse with God alone and to struggle against the temptations of the devil. Hitherto he had led a secluded and laborious life, and as long as he was employed in its obscure and painful duties we do not read that temptation assailed him, assiduous labor being in fact an effectual means of keeping it at a distance. But no sooner had the time arrived when he was to manifest himself to the world by his preaching and miracles than he determined to pass through the humiliating ordeal before entering on his mission. For himself he required no such security against the dangers of dissipation and vain-glory—the two principal sources of peril to the ministers of God's word; but in this, as in all else, he had our instruction in view. To confirm a soul in the interior life and fortify her in the practise of virtue God is pleased to keep her long hidden, as it were, beneath the shadow of his wings; and in this concealment from the world is her haven of security. But when he designs to employ her in the sanctification of others he usually prepares her beforehand by temptation, first, that her own experience may qualify her to direct others; sec-

ondly, that by redoubling her vigilance she may avoid the dangers of the dissipation likely to ensue from intercourse with creatures, for temptation opens her eyes to her spiritual miseries and impresses her with the necessity of attending to her own salvation while she seeks to promote that of others; thirdly, that the constantly recurring remembrance of her corruption and weakness may serve as a perpetual incentive to humility—that she may be ever on her guard against the admiration and applause of men, and ever careful not to attribute to herself the good of which the Almighty makes her the instrument, the glory of which should return to him alone. An attentive consideration of these reasons must be followed by a conviction of the utility of temptation to interior souls who are destined to assist others by preaching, direction, or even the intercourse of familiar conversation.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE MEANS EMPLOYED BY JESUS CHRIST
TO REPULSE THE TEMPTER.

AFTER a fast so prolonged that to all appearance it could have been endured only by miracle, nature was exhausted and Jesus experienced the pangs of hunger. The devil seized on

that moment to approach and tempt him. "If thou be the Son of God," said he, "command that these stones be made bread" (St. Matt. iv. 3). The temptation was wholly exterior; the devil appeared in a visible form and spoke. The barren wilderness presented no natural means of relief to Jesus Christ in his pressing wants. To procure sustenance it would have been necessary to recur to the exercise of his omnipotence, and this it was which the fiend proposed, for he suspected him to be the Son of God and wished to ascertain the fact beyond a doubt. His motive in seeking the knowledge was malicious, and God had designed to conceal it from him in order that the subversion of his empire and the redemption of the human race should be effected by the very efforts he should make to impede both ends. Jesus, who clearly saw the snare, replied by a quotation from Scripture: "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (*Ib.* 4). That is, the providence of God can provide other food than bread to supply the wants of man; he has but to command, and he can substitute for it any other species of nutriment. By this answer he defeated the tempter's crafty schemes and left him ignorant of the secret he sought to penetrate. Instead of profiting of Satan's suggestion to exercise his absolute power over nature he com-

mitted to his Eternal Father the care of providing for his corporal wants. God had given heavenly manna instead of bread to his people in the desert, and to this circumstance it was that Moses alluded in the words now quoted by Jesus Christ. As used by our Divine Redeemer they tend to express his confidence in that God who fails neither in the will nor the power to provide for the necessities of his creatures.

In the various wants to which by the arrangements of Providence we are exposed it too often happens that we are seized with impatience, and by our eagerness to escape from pressing difficulties involve ourselves in temptation. Satan then suggests to us, not indeed to perform miracles, but to beg them of God, and in a manner to prescribe to his divine Majesty the means by which we desire to be rescued. If he does not aid us at a time and in a manner conformable to our wishes we murmur against his will, we distrust his goodness, and sometimes carry despondency even to the extreme of criminal despair.

✓ Let us resist the tempter like Jesus Christ, and when human resources are either unattainable or exhausted let us still cherish hope in God, let us abandon ourselves to him, let us firmly believe that he will come to our assistance without disquieting our minds to discover by what means; those means we cannot foresee, and

therefore can never be prepared for. Critical occurrences of this nature are frequent in the spiritual life, during whose progress faith is so often and so severely tried. The moment when all resource seems to fail is precisely that in which God extends his help; he is pleased to wait until our confidence in him has been carried to the utmost limits, and then he manifests his power and comes to our assistance. Lay down no rules for him, prescribe no particular means of relief, but establish your soul in tranquil abandonment to his Providence, and be assured it will never deceive or disappoint you.

✓ The first temptation having proved abortive "the devil transported Jesus into the holy city and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him: If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down, for it is written: That he hath given his angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone" (*Ibid.* 5, 6). Jesus had defeated the first suggestion of Satan by opposing to it the invincible arms of confidence in God. Now the temptor urges him to abuse that confidence and carry it to extremes, under pretence that if he be the Son of God he can incur no risk in casting himself headlong from a great height. The fact was beyond dispute, yet there was no just reason why the Redeemer

should perform a miracle whose only end would have been to satisfy the curiosity of the devil and remove his doubts as to the identity between Christ and the Son of God. As Jesus had made use of Scripture language so did Satan likewise, seeking by a false and malicious application of the sacred text to justify the act he proposed to the Saviour. Jesus answered, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (*Ibid.* 7), and it would be tempting him to ask his miraculous protection in a danger incurred voluntarily and without any lawful excuse. Observe how Jesus Christ explains the Scripture by the Scripture itself, and how by the use of one clear, emphatic passage he proves that Satan had abused another passage, distorting and misapplying it.

To tempt God is a fault often committed, especially at the commencement of the spiritual life. The soul is then sometimes too much emboldened by the marks of goodness and familiarity she receives from him, and the devil, abusing her simplicity and extreme confidence, urges her to pray for favors which do not enter into the designs of Providence and are not to be expected; this, strictly speaking, is to tempt God. Again, it is tempting God to expect his assistance in such dangers of soul or body as have been encountered voluntarily; it is tempting him to make trial of his power and protec-

tion without any better reason than a curious desire to discover whether the result will answer our expectations ; it is tempting him to imitate certain extraordinary features in the lives of saints on the mere impulse of our own will—for example, to undertake severe fasting, protracted watching, and other austerities incompatible with the ordinary powers of nature ; it is tempting him, in fine, to ask for or to serve him in the view of obtaining extraordinary graces which, of themselves, cannot contribute to our sanctification. St Augustine acknowledges of himself that he had been subject to this temptation. “ How artfully,” he says, “ the enemy insinuates his suggestions and urges me to implore a miracle of thee, my God, whom I should rather serve in all humility and simplicity (*St. Augustine, Confessions*, Bk. X. c. 35). This great saint saw the snare and avoided it ; but how many souls less humble and less enlightened daily fall into it ! To compass this end the tempter employs endless stratagems and suggests innumerable arguments, good and holy in themselves, such as that the arm of God is not shortened ; that what he has done for others he can do for us ; that miracles in favor of those who love him and trust in him are to him easy of accomplishment. Satan is not at a loss for Scripture language, and when it suits his purpose he

well knows how to employ it to delude his victims. We should be ever on our guard, scrupulously examining the nature of the favors we beg of God, the circumstances under which we ask them, and, above all, the motives which influence our prayer. We should consult the enlightened servants of God, and never act according to the suggestions of our own judgment. As regards the semblance of piety under which the wily enemy disguises his assaults we shall find invincible arms against his machinations in the great principles of religion and in the words "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." We should distrust our imagination, our opinion, our vanity and curiosity, for through these alone can the enemy effect a conquest.

"Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. And said to him: All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me" (*Ibid.* 8, 9). Vanquished in his two first attempts, wherein he had tried the effect only of stealthy cunning, he now threw off the mask and exhibited himself in his true colors, proposing to the Saviour to adore him, and on this condition promising to give him the kingdoms of the world, as if they had been his to bestow. Thus he proves that his ultimate view, whether immediate or remote, is to usurp the

place of God in the heart and to induce us to transfer from our Creator to himself our adoration and allegiance. And does not man in truth adore the devil when he listens to his suggestions, yields to his wishes, and does his will in preference to the will of God? How magnificent are the rewards which the evil spirit holds out in return! How boundless the temporal advantages he engages to bestow! It is invariably by the promise of pleasures, honors, or some object connected with self-interest that he deludes his victims; and if he does not employ the same means to ensnare interior souls he knows how to allure them by holding out spiritual favors equally gratifying to their self-love. He flatters their avarice by the prospect of spiritual riches; their sensuality by imparting the deceitful sweetness and vain consolation of which he is the author; their pride by unfolding to them the glory of sublime prayer, imaginary ecstasies, revelations, and other supernatural favors. Many are the souls he has seduced and destroyed by means like these! He does not immediately discover himself and say, "Fall down and adore me"; such an open invitation to rebel against God would produce only horror; but by concealing his ultimate object he is enabled the more securely to attain it, cautiously leading his unhappy votaries to transfer their adoration from

God to their own illusions, which are the work of Satan, and reducing them under his slavery by precipitating them, with little hope of repentance, into grievous sins, either spiritual or carnal.

The essential point is to discover the object of the enemy in the various temptations he suggests, thus to anticipate their terrific consequences. They will then appear to us as diabolical as they really are, and we shall say with Jesus Christ, "Begone, Satan: for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve" (*Ibid.* 10). Thou intendest that I should adore and serve thee; this I know to be thy object; the means employed to attain it seem to bear little connection with the end proposed, but thy wily machinations shall not deceive me. Begone! I detest both thee and thy suggestions. What humility, what docility to grace are necessary to discern the snares of the enemy in time and to guard against them? To yield at the commencement of his assaults is to place ourselves completely at his mercy; in such a case it is impossible to tell how far he may lead his unfortunate victims, for, in proportion as our falls are multiplied, so do blindness and weakness increase, until they plunge us at length into still deeper crimes, rendered in the end irreparable by pride. We shall discern the wiles of Satan, we

shall distrust him, we shall abhor him only in as far as we have learned to know, to distrust, to hate, and to renounce ourselves.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION OF THE TEMPTATION.

ALTHOUGH the tempter had failed in his proposed end of ascertaining positively whether Jesus was the Son of God, nevertheless the words "Begone, Satan" fell on him with an overwhelming power which prostrated his arrogance and compelled him to retire. His suspicions must have been farther strengthened by the visible manifestation of his own utter impotence to lead the soul of Jesus to the commission of evil. He withdrew, but, as St. Luke observes, only for a time ; renewing his guilty efforts against the Saviour during the period of his Passion, when he suggested to Judas the determination to betray him, and inspired the Jews with the most vindictive hatred against Christ.

The more courageous the opposition offered to Satan the more obstinate becomes his resolution to destroy, and, when experience has taught him how powerless he is over the soul, he wreaks his vengeance on the body of God's faithful servants, as we see exemplified in the life of St. Anthony

and that of many other saints. But even over the body his power is limited by the hand of God, whose arrangements he cannot subvert. The dread of his malicious revenge should never terrify the soul into yielding to his suggestions. The most certain proof that he is reduced to the despair of the vanquished is when he transfers his assaults from the soul to the body ; the sufferings he then inflicts are a trial, not a temptation.

After Satan had retired angels approached and ministered to the Lord. Thus temptation terminates by heavenly favors, proportioned to the violence of the past conflict and the degree of resistance opposed. It is invariably followed by a reward, such as the acquisition or the gift of the virtue against which it has been directed, an increase of sanctifying grace, and a renewal of strength to combat the enemy. When temptations are extraordinary the favors which succeed to them are extraordinary likewise ; the visits of Heaven are in such cases peculiarly sweet and consoling. Experience manifests the tender care with which God watches over his servants, and the deep interest he takes in the successful issue of the struggle. Let us then combat courageously and joyfully, in the presence of our Creator, clothed with the strength of the God of Armies, who promises us the crown only on condition that we fight for it valiantly, and who is more

anxious to bestow that crown than we are to grasp it.

What do we fear? Jesus Christ has conquered for us, and we are sure of conquering like him by combating under his standard. He submitted to be tempted, not for his own advantage but for ours, teaching us by his example how we should act under temptation. He has made trial in his own person of the strength of the enemy in order to dispense to us in the measure required the succor we stand in need of. How should our heavenly High Priest fail in compassion for our infirmities since, with the exception of sin, he has experienced them all, even temptation, the greatest of the miseries to which we are liable? "It behooved him," says St. Paul, "in all things to be made like to his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest before God, that he might be a propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that wherein he hath himself suffered and been tempted he is able to succor them also that are tempted" (Heb. ii. 17, 18).

What is the interior life? A succession, a tissue of temptations of all kinds. No sooner has the soul entered on that path than she at once encounters the enemy, whose only occupation is to strew it thickly with snares. God is always near her, it is true, but so also is Satan, who gives her not a moment's respite nor ceases to pursue

her until all hope of conquering her has vanished ; that long-cherished hope he never resigns until the last extremity. But why does he so particularly direct his malice against interior souls ? It is because immense glory accrues to God from the perfect devotion of such souls, and that glory is precisely what the devil desires to dispute with its almighty possessor. Besides, their devotion is a preparatory step to the attainment of eminent sanctity, and Satan is far more earnest in his efforts to divert a soul from the pursuit of sanctity than to incite her to sin. It is rather his own wickedness than the tempter's malice that leads man to sin ; but it is more the tempter's malice than human wickedness that impedes perseverance in the practice of perfection when once that course has been seriously embraced. Moreover, God, who delights in humbling the pride of Lucifer, points out to his view the exalted virtue of certain interior souls and then asks, in the same mocking tone as he once used in making the same inquiry concerning Job, " Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a simple and upright man, and fearing God and avoiding evil ? " (Job i. 8). He loves to taunt the proud spirit into a combat with his saints in order to humble him and to glorify himself in them. He allows him to exert his utmost ingenuity as well as violence against them,

that he may be compelled to own himself conquered and pay homage to that all-powerful grace which has rendered them victorious.

Interior souls, whose strongest, or rather whose only passion is to glorify God, will succeed most effectually in this their holy aim by defying the devil to the combat, by struggling with him face to face and declaring themselves the champions of God against his foe. That audacious spirit has dared to measure his strength against the power of the Most High; but God disdains to combat with him, and the more clearly to evince his contempt of his insolence he opposes to him a feeble creature, and makes that feeble creature the instrument of the haughty spirit's defeat. What an honor to be selected for this purpose! Those so highly favored should be very humble, should place their confidence in God, and soon they will behold Satan, his rival, prostrate at their feet. The victory of Christ is to his servants a sure guarantee of their own.

CHAPTER XXII.

ELECTION OF THE APOSTLES.

JESUS CHRIST came on earth to correct man's erroneous notions and to establish the foundation of the world's regeneration, not on

riches, power, eloquence, or any other human advantage, but on poverty, weakness, ignorance, and the absence of all natural gifts. He was to employ none but supernatural means in the execution of the great work; he voluntarily selected as his own portion whatever was most contemptible in the eyes of the world; therefore it would have been inconsistent to choose for his apostles any but men exteriorly like himself, poor, unlettered, obscure, destitute of all that is calculated, humanly speaking, to attract esteem and respect. It is evident that a work commenced, pursued, and completed by the hand of God should be carried on by himself alone, independently of all external aid, so that the glory of its successful termination may be attributable only to its great Author. This was one of the principal reasons which induced the Man-God to embrace as his own lot a state of obscurity and abjection, and to select for his apostles persons poor and unknown like himself. The greater number of them were, by his own choice, ill-bred, illiterate, and engaged in the meanest trade; yet, poor as they were, he required that before becoming his disciples they should not only renounce the little they possessed but sacrifice even the desire of future acquisitions. He allured them to his standard by no promise of temporal aggrandizement, but ever directed his most strenuous efforts to eradicate

from their hearts the least seeds of ambition. He held out to them no prospect but that of contradiction, persecution, suffering, and contempt, showing them from the beginning, by his own example, what they were to expect in his service. If he unfolded to their view the glory of a kingdom it was of a heavenly kingdom, totally different in its elements from the kingdoms of the earth; of a kingdom whose long-sealed portals could be opened only by the cross, and whose low and narrow entrance could give admittance only to humility and detachment. If he promised them a treasure it was a treasure of a supernatural order, a treasure whose value could be discerned only by the eyes of faith, a treasure to be purchased at no other price than the renunciation, at least in spirit, of temporal riches and earthly pretensions. Thus it is evident he attracted them by no inducements connected with the present life; those which he partially revealed bore reference to a future state, whose nature they could but faintly conceive, and whose advantages they could therefore believe only on his authority.

Before electing his apostles "Jesus went out into a mountain to pray, and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God" (St. Luke vi. 12). In this prolonged prayer he asked and obtained the graces they needed for the fulfilment of their

mission, and it was not until the following day after his prayer had been heard that he made known the privileged objects on whom his choice had fallen.

How replete with instruction is this passage of the life of Christ? The work of God, commenced by the Redeemer, continues, and will continue to the end of time. All who desire to contribute to its accomplishment in any way, whether by prayer, example, or exhortation, should first dispose themselves for so great an end by self-denial and humility, never relying on human means, which, in such a case, are of no avail, or rather calculated only to impede success. When natural talents or acquired gifts are called into action, care should be taken to sanctify the use by acknowledging that they come from God, that they should be consecrated wholly to God, and that to God it belongs to direct their exercise. The mind should be deeply imbued with this conviction, that natural talents, however well employed, are of little, or rather no value in comparison with supernatural endowments, which, in fact, alone are available in the great work now treated of; that God imparts these qualifications according to his own sovereign pleasure, and that those alone deserve the gift who deem themselves the most unworthy. Profound humility, perfect detachment, death to

created things, these are the source of all the good which God designs to effect here below through the agency of man; these are the only instruments his grace employs; the apostles of Jesus and Jesus himself have reaped the rich fruits of the heavenly harvest through no other means. Many devote their lives and exertions to laboring directly for the salvation of their neighbor; many more seek to promote the same end by every species of active good work; others again multiply prayers and austerities with the same view. But have they ever considered that humility should be here the main-spring of action? that the smallest attachment to self, the least motive or view referring to self retards, diminishes, or altogether impedes the success of the holiest enterprises? No; this important truth is not sufficiently understood, and to this cause alone may be attributed the insignificance of the fruit produced when compared with the earnestness of the efforts employed.

Farther still; there are many who desire to devote themselves as victims to the promotion of God's glory who yet have never taken into serious consideration that they will advance the glory of God only at the expense of their own, and that consequently they must be prepared for suffering and humiliation, contradiction and persecution, contempt, calumny, and ill-treatment,

submitting even to be trampled and crushed as worms of the earth. To indulge in other speculations, to form other plans, is to deceive ourselves, to contradict the Gospel of Christ, and to oppose an insurmountable barrier to the glory of God.

But without claiming the title of an apostle, or seeking a further distinction than that of a disciple of Jesus Christ, can any one belong to him unless he be humble, detached from the world, and dead to self; unless, in a word, he willingly bear the cross of his Master? Such were the virtues he required of all whom he called to follow him; those who refused to embrace them finally withdrew from his company altogether. We cannot claim Jesus for our Master, either in the last period of his life on Calvary or in any other portion of his mortal career, unless we desire to resemble him; and in what are we to resemble him if not in the virtues just enumerated? Why, then, do the generality of Christians neglect the practise of these virtues? Is it that they do not recognize them as a constituent portion of the Christian code, or is it that they hold them in abhorrence? Why are these virtues so little esteemed, so little practised even by souls who profess to lead a spiritual life? They are the foundation of a spiritual life, which cannot exist without them, their absence

leaving only a vain and delusive phantom of the interior life ; and yet we will not submit to prayer that humbles us, to trials that mortify us, to afflictions that detach us, to temptations that reveal our innate corruption and manifest what we should be without divine grace.

In fine, God sometimes confides to one individual the spiritual guardianship of another, with the view that one shall assist the other in the prosecution of some particular enterprise connected with the divine glory. Souls thus invested with the character and charged with the duties of disciples should be careful before concluding on the selection of a guide to ascertain that that selection has been directed by the will of God. They should consult the Almighty in prayer, humbly imploring his heavenly light, with great distrust of their own judgment, and never allowing their decision to be influenced by natural endowments, brilliant talents, or external qualifications, which are often deceitful, and rather prejudicial than useful in carrying on the work of God. Samuel was a saint and a prophet ; yet, when commanded by the Almighty to select from among the sons of Isai a successor to Saul, he was on the verge of mistaking the individual on whom the divine choice had fallen. The comely mien and majestic deportment of those first presented to him had nearly influenced his decision

in their favor, while David, the youthful shepherd elected by God himself, was the only one of the family deemed unworthy to appear before the prophet. "Man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart" (I. Kings xvi. 7). It is by the heart he judges, because on the nature of its hidden dispositions all depends, and as he alone can sound its depths he alone should be consulted on all occasions. You direct your ardent zeal and principal solicitude towards an individual whom you suppose peculiarly formed to advance rapidly in the ways of God and especially calculated to aid you in your holy undertakings. God often judges differently, as the event proves. The one to whom you trusted unexpectedly fails you, and you find that all your exertions for him end in nothing; whereas some other person, from whom you expected little or nothing, makes an astonishing progress in the spiritual life, and to him the grace of God is given to co-operate in your good works. God is a jealous God; he compels us to acknowledge that all good gifts come from him, and his blessing never attends the efforts which proceed solely from the dictates of man's own will and judgment. Let us be humble in our undertakings and our undertakings will prosper; this is a fundamental truth which cannot be too strongly insisted on.

CHAPTER XXIII.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE PREACHING OF
JESUS CHRIST.

WE cannot examine one single fact in the life of Jesus Christ without observing that humility was the groundwork of his whole existence. His mission being to enlighten the universe, it would appear to human views that he should have taken immediate measures to diffuse the universal knowledge of the true God, and that by the manifestation of his wisdom and power he should have proved the divinity of his person and his mission to the two greatest nations of the earth—the Romans, masters of the world, and the Greeks, distinguished above all other people for their refinement of taste and extensive acquaintance with the fine arts. By discovering to the chiefs and magistrates of Rome the errors of idolatry, by leading the Grecian philosophers into the path of truth, he would soon have paved the way for the unlimited dissemination of the true religion. He could undoubtedly have done so, but these glorious conquests he reserved for his apostles and chose for the field of his own labors the much-despised province of Judea, although the success of his exertions in this insig-

nificant portion of the globe seemed little likely to be followed by any useful results for the world at large.

In what part of Judea itself did he commence his labors? Did he repair at once to the capital and preach the kingdom of God in the midst of Herod's court? Did he go to enlighten the priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees, and to point out to them in his own sacred person and heavenly doctrine the fulfilment of the law and the prophecies? This would appear the shortest, the most natural, and the most direct means of attaining his end. The city of Jerusalem and the principal men of the nation once gained over all the rest must have speedily followed. But not thus was to open the mission of the most humble of the sons of men; the teacher and model of humility. The prophet Isaias had compared him to a plant springing from a parched and barren soil (Is. liii. 2). How weak that plant! how tardy its growth, deprived as it is of needful nourishment! How small the grain of mustard-seed which is one day to lift its head so high and to serve as a resting-place for the birds of the air! How insignificant, nay, almost imperceptible, the stone destined to become a towering mountain, whose gigantic limits shall embrace the universe!

In the villages and hamlets of Galilee, the most obscure portion of Judea, the province whence no prophet had ever arisen, the Lawgiver and Saviour of men opens his public career. The first objects of his notice are low-born, ignorant, uncouth fishermen; from among the poor he selects the first hearers of his Gospel, and by this mark, still more than by his miracles, of which the poor were the principal objects, he wishes that the disciples of St. John should recognize him. He will go to Jerusalem, but only to fulfil the duties of the law by appearing in the temple at the solemn festivals. He will preach there as opportunities offer, and will publicly instruct the people in the house of God. Without evincing marked contempt for the powerful and learned, he will not seek their company or show any desire to cultivate their acquaintance, that his actions may be ever consistent with the lessons of humility he inculcates. He foresees that such a line of conduct will irritate the pride of the great; that it will prejudice them against his person; that it will excite their jealousy and hatred; that it will be construed into a just motive for despising and rejecting him as one to whom only the rabble afford countenance. But none of these considerations will deter him from faithfully pursuing his first determination, even though he should become its victim. He never

shall be reproached with having sought to acquire a great name or to gain the favor of persons distinguished for birth, authority, and learning.

Preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, confessors, who in the holy tribunal reconcile the penitent spirit with Jesus Christ, directors, who profess to conduct souls into the ways of Jesus Christ, do you imitate him in this particular? Preachers of the Word, do you never seek to display your powers on vast theatres, where your eloquence may astonish, your knowledge dazzle, your zeal shine forth with a brilliant lustre? Do you prefer preaching the gospel to the poor inhabitants of towns and villages? Alas! could they understand your learned disquisitions? could they appreciate your flowing style, your subtle arguments? It is but too evident you never had them in view in the composition of your highly-wrought pieces of oratory, which nothing but folly could tempt you to rehearse for their instruction. Indeed it never occurs to you to do so, and therefore it is that you aim at attracting to your sermons only the exalted in rank, the gifted in worldly possessions, the cultivated in intellect; should any individuals of the more humble and obscure class chance to assist at them they certainly could hear nothing adapted to their personal necessities. But if the principal

characteristic of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was its being preached to the poor in a style of language suited to their comprehension what idea can you have formed of the ministry of the Word, judging from the manner in which you discharge its sacred duties? You may enjoy an extensive reputation as a preacher; your sermons may be attended by men of learning and women of distinction, but Jesus Christ condemns you and blots your name from off the list of his preachers. I am aware of the many excuses you allege in your justification, but the example of Jesus Christ replies to all and must necessarily confute your arguments. Compare, if you dare, your studied compositions with his sermon on the mount, with his parables and familiar instructions. His audience on those occasions consisted of the common people. Would the tone you assume in your sermons have been adapted to the description of hearers he had to instruct? Why do you thus deviate from the example the Man-God has laid down for your imitation, unless because your attention is directed solely to please the more brilliant portion of your audience, to whom, in fact, you preach yourself instead of preaching Jesus Christ.

Confessors, do you welcome the poor to the tribunal of penance as warmly as the rich? I do not ask if you give them the preference, but only

if you receive them with equal cordiality, if they experience from you the same meekness, the same kindness, the same readiness to hear the recital of their miseries, the same solicitude, the same zeal, the same condescension? Yet you well know that the poor were the special objects of Christ's love; you are, moreover, aware that among them you would meet more abundant opportunities of doing good; that you would have fewer difficulties to contend with and experience a greater return of gratitude; neither are you ignorant that they, above all others, stand in need of the gentle words of sympathy and comfort. Why, then, do they fear you? Why are they too timid to approach you with confidence? Why are you never at leisure to attend to them and never at a loss for whole hours to devote to persons of rank and distinction? If you reject the poor Jesus Christ will assuredly reject you from among the number of his ministers.

Directors of souls, do you imagine that the sons of poverty are debarred from the advantages of the interior life? that they are incapable of prayer? that they are prohibited from aiming at the perfection of the gospel morality? They are, on the contrary, infinitely better disposed for it than the children of affluence and prosperity. The language of the cross is more intelligible to

them, accustomed as they are to bear the weight of that cross. In such a field for your zeal you would reap a boundless harvest; whereas now you squander much precious time to no purpose among devotees whose self-love you foster and feed and who are satisfied with your direction only because it makes them satisfied with themselves. The reason of your preference is very evident. Among the poor nothing is to be gained except for the glory of God; among the rich everything is to be gained for yourself. Jesus Christ never sought his own interest, and therefore he loved the company of the poor; you seek only your own interest, your comfort, your reputation, and therefore you confine your direction to the rich.

All Christians have a deep interest in discerning the true from the counterfeit ministers of Jesus Christ, since on their zeal so greatly depends the progress of the soul. Those are secure against mistakes who attach themselves to the instructors, the confessors, the directors of the poor—that is, to those who, without excluding the rich, devote their principal exertions and consecrate their first affections to the poor. There can be no doubt that these receive a more abundant infusion of heavenly light and grace; that they preach with more unction; that they exercise their functions in the holy tribunal with

more efficacy; that they are influenced by more upright views; that they act with more zeal, more patience, more prudence, and more success.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE NATURE OF THE REDEEMER'S INSTRUCTIONS.

‘FROM the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh’ (St. Luke vi. 45), not alone in the words it utters, but also in the manner of pronouncing them. An humble master may communicate deep knowledge, but he will impart it with humility; his air and tone of voice will never betray pride or self-sufficiency. He will stoop to a level with those he addresses and adapt his instructions to their comprehension. If he speaks emphatically and authoritatively it is not with a view of assuming importance in the eyes of his hearers, but rather to exalt him in whose name he speaks and to produce a stronger impression on those he teaches. Such was the method adopted by Christ in his instructions; his words were those of a Man-God, the Master and Legislator of the human race; they were words of sovereign wisdom and infallible truth; yet were they ever the accents of deep humility. His discourses

were characterized neither by a bombastic style nor a studied eloquence, but by a divine simplicity which touches the heart and fascinates the understanding. It would be impossible to clothe truths so exalted in a plainer garb. The prophets appear awed at the sublimity of the revelations unfolded to them; the perusal of their works conveys the immediate impression that some spirit foreign from their own must have dictated the heavenly oracles, and that in penning down those wondrous inspirations the writers were in a manner transported beyond themselves by the sublimity of the subject. The instructions of Jesus were, on the contrary, invariably accompanied with the most perfect self-possession, because it required no effort to draw from the source of heavenly wisdom residing within him, and it excited no overpowering emotion to treat of truths the most abstruse, familiar as they were to him. The plenitude of knowledge resided in himself and could not be exhausted by communication. His expressions, without being vulgar, were adapted to the most limited comprehension, and yet they conceal a meaning so deep that the most brilliant geniuses, the most enlightened saints, can but imperfectly penetrate the mystery. His similes were drawn from ordinary objects, his parables were of the most familiar description; he did not argue, or seek to

demonstrate like the philosophers, but contented himself with affirming and explaining. It was not the understanding speaking to the understanding, as in the case of those who impart human science, but the heart speaking to the heart ; the heart filled to overflowing with the truths communicated, and therefore imparting with facility a share of its abundance to those who listened. The science he taught was the science of salvation, a science wholly moral ; a science whose principles, being engraven on the heart of man by the Creator's hand, were but developed by Jesus Christ, who, while he proposed them to the understanding, at the same time prepared the heart to receive and relish them. Of this his conversation with the Samaritan woman is an instance. He began by engaging her interest ; gradually he fixed her attention ; then he revealed his heavenly doctrine, and finally brought her to acknowledge him for the Messiah. This happy consummation was no doubt to be attributed to the silent workings of divine grace, but his words of life were the external instruments of that grace ; the latter he regulated exactly in accordance with the impression gradually produced by the former. But, if simple with the unlettered, he knew well how to assume a tone of dignity for the humiliation of those who needed to be humbled. The plan he pursued with Nico-

demus, a doctor of the law, differed from that adopted with the Samaritan woman. To the former he proposed supernatural doctrine, which, being totally beyond his comprehension, was understood by him in a gross and material sense. Instead of relieving his perplexity Christ only added to it, by introducing the mention of mysteries still more abstruse than those he had previously laid before him, thus to oblige him to confess his ignorance. "Art thou a master in Israel," said he, "and knowest not these things?" (St. John iii. 10). To this acknowledgment he sought to bring him, as a necessary preliminary to his assisting with profit at the instructions of the Incarnate Wisdom.

His words, ever accompanied as they were by the strong influence of divine grace, produced a deep impression on all well-disposed hearts, while even his enemies involuntarily paid homage to their truth and power. "The people," says St. Matthew, "were in admiration at his doctrine; for he was teaching them as one having power, and not as their scribes and Pharisees" (St. Matt. vii. 28, 29). Nevertheless, these scribes and Pharisees were invested with lawful authority, because seated on the chair of Moses; this authority Jesus Christ himself recognized, but they were not on that account the less human teachers, who mingled their traditions with the

ordinances of the law; who spoke by the impulse of their own spirit, not by the inspiration of the Spirit of God; who were puffed up with their knowledge, and used it only as a means of gratifying their avarice and ambition. They were in every particular diametrically opposed to Jesus Christ, and therefore it was that they had not, like him, the esteem and confidence of the people. "Never did man speak like this man" (St. John vii. 46), was the remark made to the chief priests and Pharisees by the persons whom they had sent to apprehend Jesus, and who, fascinated by his divine eloquence and filled with reverence for his sacred person, durst not lay hands on him.

Such is also, allowing for the proportionate difference, the method of instruction adopted, whether verbally or in writing, by those who are animated with an interior spirit; their air, their tone, their manner, their style has something peculiar to themselves which cannot be imitated by any but interior men. They speak with confidence, and at the same time with humility, because it is not from themselves they speak; art, argument, and study have no share in their instructions; nevertheless these instructions are irresistibly persuasive, bearing in their own native simplicity the undeniable evidence of truth. They enlighten the mind but, more than that, they touch the heart, they warm it, they pene-

trate it, they fill it with heavenly unction. They are simple, natural, and familiar, but these very qualities bear the impress of a dignity, a majesty, which commands and subdues; they are not adorned with flowery metaphors, they do not sparkle with bright flashes of eloquence, yet they produce in well-disposed hearts such fruit as can proceed only from the grace by which they have been dictated. This is, as I have already observed, the distinguishing characteristic of those preachers, confessors, directors, and pious authors who are guided by the spirit of God: souls who lead an interior life, or whom the call of grace invites to do so, never can be deceived as to this peculiar character, for there is a kind of connection between the dispositions of both, their hearts responding, as it were, to the same emotions. To those who have no experimental knowledge of the interior life the dogma I now advance must be unintelligible; the simplicity of a preacher, a director, or a pious author will never have any charms for them; they will relish neither his doctrine nor his manner of proposing it. The reason is, that they consult, listen to, and decide according to the dictates of human judgment alone. If they were sufficiently candid they would own, as St. Augustine acknowledges of himself before his conversion, that they find the style of the holy Scriptures too simple;

that the facts narrated in the Gospel are too destitute of external ornament, and that, as for its morality, they understand little or nothing about it. The same may be said of certain spiritual books: the *Imitation of Christ* is in universal circulation, yet how few understand and relish it! How few can discern the beauties of its simple style! how few can comprehend the sublimity of its doctrine or feel the sweetness of its hidden unction! It was composed by a man of prayer, and will never be understood but by men of prayer.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE LABORS ENDURED BY JESUS CHRIST IN HIS PUBLIC LIFE.

IF we consider the labors of the public life of Jesus Christ simply in themselves we shall find that they have been surpassed in duration and severity by those of many apostolic men; although his sufferings in this respect must necessarily have been very great, embracing as he did unsparingly all the pain and fatigue attendant on his mission. He was incessantly travelling through the towns and villages, stopping scarcely anywhere to rest. His journeys were all performed on foot and without any precaution

against the intense heat of the climate; his food was that of the poorest, barley bread and fish; even for that miserable sustenance he was indebted to the charity of some holy women who attended his divine instructions. He twice wrought a miracle to feed a multitude; we do not read that he ever performed one to relieve his own necessities. The best proof of his indifference to his corporal wants was that he allowed the avaricious Judas to dispose of the common fund appropriated to the maintenance of himself and his followers. He had no fixed place for the night's rest, frequently spending it in prayer, exposed to the inclemency of the seasons, allowing nature only the limited repose indispensable to its support, for it must not be imagined that he maintained his strength by supernatural means. Except during his fast of forty days in the desert, it does not appear that he deviated from the ordinary laws of nature in this respect; he suffered the inconveniences of heat and cold, the pains of hunger and thirst, the lassitude of fatigue and exhaustion; he suffered also from the overpowering pressure of the multitude who perpetually thronged around him. An idea may be formed of his extreme destitution from his reply to a doctor of the law who expressed a wish to follow him. "The foxes," said he, "have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son

of Man hath not where to lay his head" (St. Matt. viii. 20).

But the point most worthy of our serious attention is the interior disposition which accompanied his exterior labors—labors so unremitting as to engross his whole existence. Amidst them all his soul overflowed with the peace of heaven; nothing distracted him, nothing diverted him from the closest union with his Father; no complaint escaped him, not even the slightest evidence that he suffered. While totally indifferent to his own interests, his anxiety for the welfare of man was such that his whole life and energies were devoted to promoting the advantage of others. The glory of his Father and the spiritual good of souls were the only objects which engrossed his mind and heart; his zeal for the promotion of these two ends devoured and consumed him. The only point capable of awakening his regret was the comparative inutility of his labors and miracles, which gained him but few followers and procured him a host of enemies; yet even this pang, acute though it was, never ruffled the deep-seated tranquillity of his soul. His profound humility was evinced in his voluntary submission to a state whose poverty and dependence seemed derogatory to the dignity not only of his person but even of his ministry. How lively must have been the faith which could recognize the Son of

God amidst the lowly crowd who surrounded him, which could discern the Deity under the disguise of a mortal, subject to all the accidents of life, sinking with fatigue and exhaustion, and buried in the depths of poverty ! Can we wonder that those who viewed him with human eyes should have scorned and despised him, employing as a pretext to justify their incredulity the abject indigence, which they considered a sufficient counterpoise to the splendid testimonies hourly given of his divinity ? He knew that his poverty, his simplicity, his humble mien, his preference for the poor would produce this effect and alienate many minds from him, yet the knowledge never interfered with his esteem for and public profession of humility. His Father had so ordained it, his own will coincided with that of his Father, and for him obedience was invested with heavenly attractions.

Every pastor charged with the care of souls is more or less called to participate in the labors of the apostles ; the functions of some entail greater bodily fatigue ; those of others greater mental application. But the duties of clergymen consecrated to missions, either at home or abroad, bear a peculiar resemblance to the pursuits of Jesus Christ in his public life. Let them examine if they never spare themselves ; if they cheerfully embrace the privations of poverty, the vicis-

itudes of the seasons, and the various kinds of external mortification inseparable from the exercise of their functions. But, even supposing them to be poor, austere towards themselves, dependent on Providence for the relief of their corporal wants, and indefatigable in labor, they will but imperfectly imitate Jesus Christ if they do not study his interior dispositions; if their occupations distract them; if they are not constantly united to God by prayer; if they do not even encroach when necessary on the period allotted for rest to discharge this sacred duty, and, above all, if they are not steadily established in humility. If this interior foundation fail they are exposed to glory in their fatigues and sufferings, in the magnitude of their enterprises, and the splendor of their success; they are liable to boast of their achievements; to feed on the applause of creatures, and even arrogantly to extol their own performances. They are often supported under their trying and laborious duties by no other prop than that of self-love, and so surely as the crowd forsakes them, or that their exertions cease to produce the numerous and brilliant conversions they desire, so surely are they grieved, dispirited, and discouraged. Let them study Jesus Christ; let them choose him for their model; let them adopt his sentiments, and firmly believe that it is in his interior dispositions they are most strictly

obliged to imitate him. It would be desirable that they were less carried away by impetuosity, eagerness, ardor, and precipitation, and more under the influence of calm recollection and internal peace; in a word, more closely concentrated in God. They but too often lose sight of their own spiritual welfare in laboring for the salvation of others, forgetting that on their own sanctification depends that of their neighbor. An apostle without an interior spirit is an apostle only in name.

There are souls who, without openly embracing the functions of the apostles, at least in their strict signification, are yet called on to discharge the office of apostles spiritually and secretly, God alone being the witness of their zeal. To these souls the Almighty proposes the endurance of severe and protracted sufferings, with the view of obtaining the conversion of a particular nation, the propagation or the re-establishment of the faith in certain countries. If they accept and bear those sufferings according to the views of God, who can doubt that they have in reality the merit of apostles, contributing more largely to the conversion of nations than those actively employed in laboring for it? Is it not a fact that Jesus Christ advanced the work of human redemption more by his interior pains than by his exterior labors? In like man-

ner, those who resemble him most in his sufferings are his principal associates in carrying on the glorious work.

Other souls, again, are destined to propagate the knowledge of the interior life, the mysteries of which Jesus Christ unfolded during his public career to a privileged few—as Martha, Mary, and his apostles. This species of direction has its own peculiar labors and difficulties, which, though not apparent, crucify nature and finally lead to its extinction. It requires much prayer, much patience, continual renunciation of self-will, and absolute dependence on grace, ever co-operating with but never anticipating its operations. It is the source of much anxious solicitude, when there is reason to fear that the persons directed are not faithful in corresponding with the designs of God. If to convert sinners be a difficult work, still more difficult is it to engage souls in the path of perfection and to encourage them to pursue it to the end. If the obligation of ordinary apostles to lead an interior life is imperative, still more indispensable is it in the directors now alluded to; because the guide who proposes to lead others to sanctity must aspire to it himself, aiming at what is most excellent, consequently most difficult, in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST.

MIRACLES were necessary to prove the divinity of Jesus Christ, to enforce the truth of his heavenly doctrine, and to substantiate his claim to the title of the Messias. His love for men also acted as a powerful stimulus to the exertion of his omnipotence. But he took care to conciliate the exercise of his dominion over nature with the practice of his cherished virtue of humility, and necessitated as he was to manifest his power by prodigies, he so concerted his plans as never on that account to withdraw from the shadow of that obscurity he so dearly loved.

Every description of miracles was at his option. He could have wrought wonders like to those of Moses, and afflicted with plagues the incredulous and obdurate province of Judea; or, like Elias, he could have called fire from heaven on his enemies. The latter expedient his disciples proposed to him in punishment of the Samaritans, who refused to let him pass through their territory when on his way to Jerusalem. "And turning, he rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are. The

Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save" (St. Luke ix. 55, 56). He could have produced signs and wonders in the heavens, as the Pharisees often requested from a malicious desire to put his powers to the test, but he invariably refused the petition, calling them an evil and adulterous generation, and referring them to the sign of Jonas, a figure of his resurrection. It would have been derogatory to his dignity to work miracles for the gratification of his enemies' curiosity, and no less unworthy would have been the motive of spreading his own fame and insuring himself an empty reputation.

The miracles of his selection were miracles of pure benevolence, their sole object being the relief of human wants and infirmities; as, for example, to heal lepers, to restore health to the sick, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, activity to the lame, and vigor to the paralyzed; to raise the dead, and chase the evil spirit from the unhappy victims who had long groaned under his tyranny. These miracles he wrought as opportunity offered, and seemingly without premeditation. He did not endeavor by a previous announcement to arouse wondering expectation and strong excitement, but he performed them silently, without preparation, ostentation, or display. He frequently concealed his real char-

acter from the favored objects of his mercy, as happened in the case of the man who had suffered thirty-eight years from palsy, and also of the afflicted being blind from his birth ; to these he eventually revealed himself, but only in secret and as a recompense for their faith. He frequently commanded those he had healed to conceal the fact, and seemed ever apprehensive lest his miracles should become public. After he had multiplied the loaves for the first time the witnesses of the prodigy, recognizing in him the prophet who was to come into the world, and wishing to make him king, he fled, and retired alone into a mountain. He attributed his miracles less to his own power than to the faith of those who applied to him: "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole" (St. Luke viii. 48); "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done to thee as thou wilt" (St. Matt. xv. 28); "As thou hast believed, so be it done to thee" (*Ibid.* viii. 13); "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (St. Mark ix. 22). In fine, he referred all his wondrous performances to his Father; his works he declared to be the works his Father had given him to do, and himself but the minister of his Father's will. What humility in him, who by one word could reverse the laws of nature ! In not a single miracle can it be said he sought his own glory or aimed at attracting

human applause. Nevertheless he was God, and his mission could not be fulfilled unless he were recognized as God; the ultimate object of his miracles was to impress all minds with the conviction of his divinity. Yet, judging by his conduct, it would appear that this end was one in which he had no concern; in which he took no interest; which he was not charged to labor for, but which it depended on his Father alone to promote. Thus, even while exercising his omnipotence, Jesus displayed his deep humility.

The gift of miracles is not a common one; God communicates it only when it becomes necessary as a means of establishing or reviving faith. Those to whom he imparts it need scarcely be told of their imperative obligation to cherish humility. Were that precious virtue to be even slightly impaired in consequence the gift of God would be lost to them, and happy would they become in the deprivation. This gift is not bestowed for their own profit; of itself it can produce no increase of sanctifying grace, it is rather to be dreaded than desired, so great is the danger that, not being entirely consecrated to the glory of God and the good of souls, it may become for the possessors a deadly poison. They should never lose sight of the answer of Christ to the seventy-two disciples when, on returning from their mission, they told Christ with joy, "Lord,

the devils are also subject to us in thy name. And he said to them: I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven"; thus cautioning them against pride and vanity. "Rejoice not in this," he added, "that spirits are subject unto you: but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven" (St Luke x. 17, 18-20). It is not the dominion over spirits but the practice of Christian virtues, and particularly of humility, which insures to the soul the rewards of heaven. How often we hear it said: "Such a person is a saint; he performs miracles." The gift of miracles is, no doubt, a great argument in favor of sanctity, yet I should say with much more confidence, "Such a person is a saint, whether he performs miracles or not, for he is humble." Jesus Christ clearly supposes that even with the gift of miracles the soul may be lost. "Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name? And then I will profess unto them: I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity (St. Matt. vii. 22, 23). On that same day of judgment the humble man, though perhaps once a sinner and a great one, far from being rejected, will receive a welcome from his humble Saviour, who himself assures us of the fact in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

There are miracles of another order which are not of rare occurrence in the interior life. Independently of the other supernatural favors sometimes granted by the Almighty to certain souls, he frequently communicates to them, particularly when employed in the direction of others, the knowledge of the secrets of hearts; the actual view of events yet hidden in the bosom of time; a certain empire over souls, by which they are enabled to dispel the temptations which trouble them, and to restore them to spiritual peace and joy; with many similar gifts which cannot be considered other than miraculous. Humility should be jealously guarded in the use of these gifts, which are bestowed only for the spiritual good of others; they should never be looked on as a title to respect and esteem; they should be employed only according to the designs of God and no alloy of self-seeking mingled with their use, as but too often happens. The individual privileged with such gifts should look on himself as a mere instrument of grace, acting and speaking from its inspiration, simply, without premeditation, without reference to self, avoiding even to direct the soul's attention to the wonders wrought in her by his agency. Oh, how single-hearted, how detached, how dead to self must a director be thus to exercise his sacred functions! How many false directors imagine themselves

possessed of these gifts, of which they have in reality but the empty shadow, and then plunge themselves and others into pride and illusion, reflecting disgrace on all that is holiest in the evangelical ministry !

CHAPTER XXVII.

RESERVE OF JESUS CHRIST IN MANIFESTING HIS DIVINITY.

IT is a circumstance well worthy of remark that Jesus Christ rarely, and only on important occasions, declared himself the Son of God, while he habitually called himself the Son of man. He wished to exercise the faith of his followers by the seemingly contradictory qualities they observed in him—the union of majesty with abject poverty, omnipotence with extreme weakness. When he said that “he and his Father are one” (St. John x. 30), that “before Abraham was made he existed” (*Ibid.* viii. 58), that “the Father was in him and he in the Father” (*Ibid.* x. 38), his enemies were irritated by enigmatical expressions which, considering him as they did with the eyes of the flesh alone, were beyond the reach of their comprehension. Even in revealing his divinity he carefully sustained the character of humility he had assumed

at his first appearance on earth, and while more than amply manifesting it to the Jews, both by work and word, he at the same time humbled their arrogance and overturned their proud but fanciful visions of their expected Messias' glory. Another difficulty he had to avoid in the too-open manifestation of his person was that it might have interfered with the fulfilment of the prophecies which declared that he was to be condemned as a blasphemer for usurping the title of the Son of God. Such is the cause of the mingled evidence and obscurity we observe in such parts of his discourses as refer to the manifestation of his divinity. He foresaw the abuses into which future heretics would fall in consequence; he knew that his life would be the penalty of the mystery which hung around his words; yet he was not the less reserved in speaking of himself, making known what he really was only to his apostles and a few chosen friends, and even to them recommending secrecy. When St. Peter said: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God" (St. Matt. xvi. 16), he forbid him and the other disciples to tell any one that he was the Messias. And, as if to counterbalance the exalted opinion they entertained of him, he at the same moment foretold in their hearing all the torments and humiliations he should endure in his Passion (St. Matt. xvi. 20, 21).

In his transfiguration he discovered to Peter, James, and John the splendors of his glorified body; they saw Moses and Elias, who conversed with Jesus regarding the violent death he was to undergo at Jerusalem; the eternal Father again bore testimony to him, calling him his beloved Son, and commanding all to hear him; yet, as they descended the mountain where this magnificent scene had occurred, Christ prohibited their speaking of the splendid vision until the Son of man should have risen from the dead; and in the course of the same conversation he told them that he should be treated by the Jews in the same manner as John the Baptist had been treated. How great the efforts he made to weaken the impression produced by that glimpse of his glory! The eternal Father had designated him as his well-beloved Son; he called himself the Son of man, and assured them that the body they had just beheld more resplendent than the sun would soon fall a prey to torments and death. In fine, he commanded them to conceal the favor he had done them, even from the other apostles, until after his resurrection.

The evil spirits whom he compelled to relinquish possession of their victims loudly proclaimed him the Son of God; whether they spoke thus of themselves, or were constrained to do so by a superior power, he equally forbid

them to divulge his divinity and reduced them to silence, glorious as would have been the homage paid to truth by the spirits of darkness. To sum up all in a word, the Gospel gives testimony that Jesus Christ never spoke publicly of his divinity except when unavoidably necessary ; that even then he declared it with the most cautious reserve ; that in all other cases he carefully concealed it, while he seemed to delight in adverting to his humanity, loving and claiming our love for the nature he had deigned to assume for our sakes.

The souls on whom God bestows the highest heavenly favors he invariably inspires to pursue the same line of conduct, requiring that in this point above all others they faithfully imitate Jesus Christ. He allows them to mention the graces received to their directors alone, and that with the sole view of being more securely guided. The pretext of God's glory and our neighbor's edification, which is sometimes used to justify confidential communications on such matters, should be distrusted as vain and, at the best, doubtful. Such communications are detrimental to humility, that precious virtue which should be cherished as the apple of the eye, because from it alone really redounds glory to God and edification to our fellow-creatures. We should desire that the favors of heaven may remain for ever

buried in the hearts which have become their depository ; far from speaking, we should not even think of them, but banish the remembrance as soon, after they have passed away, as we have complied with the necessary duty of revealing them to authorized superiors. If it be essential to God's glory that these favors be made known to men he will provide the means ; he will manifest them in his own time, without detriment to our virtue ; he will open our lips, however resolutely determined we may be to keep them sealed ; he will oblige us, through the authority of superiors, in defiance of all repugnance, to commit to writing the details of our spiritual concerns, or he will cause them to be written by others on our own verbal testimony. But revelations of this kind do not appertain to the commencement or even the progress of the spiritual life. The Almighty permits them only at the very term of existence, sometimes allowing them to be made public only after death. Let us ever treat more willingly of subjects calculated to lower than to exalt us in the opinion of others, or rather let us not speak at all of our interior dispositions, not even indirectly. Humility which loves the light is usually nothing better than vanity in disguise. Profound silence and great care to avoid observation is the most perfect as well as the most secure plan. " Love to

be unknown and reputed as nothing" (Bk. I. c. ii. n. 3), says the author of the *Imitation*; such should be the favorite maxim of all interior souls.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONDUCT OF JESUS CHRIST TOWARDS HIS APOSTLES.

THOUGH few details have been transmitted to us regarding the domestic life of Jesus Christ with his apostles, yet from the little which has reached us we may form a correct idea on the subject. They had left all to follow him; what had they gained in exchange? Poverty, fatigue, much labor, little rest, contempt, envy, and calumny. What were their anticipations for the present life? Sorrows, afflictions, and persecutions like to those of their Master. Jesus desired to attach them to his service by supernatural motives alone; he wished that they should expect from him no temporal advantage, and look forward to no reward but that of heaven. Thus he required of them the most perfect detachment, with an absolute renunciation of all earthly hopes and prospects.

Yet, imbued as they were with the prejudices common to the nation at large, they, too, believed that the Messiah would be a great con-

queror and his kingdom of this world; and, therefore, they disputed for the first places in that kingdom, as is evident from the petition of the sons of Zebedee. The rest of the apostles were filled with jealousy and indignation at the request of the two brothers, and hence it is clear that their hearts, too, were the seat of deep ambition. Jesus Christ spared no pains to undeceive them, and, for this purpose, frequently detailed to them the ignominies of his approaching death. To support their faith, he added the prediction of his resurrection on the third day; but they understood not his words, and built not the less their worldly and chimerical pretensions on this, his expected resurrection. The illusion lasted up to the period of Christ's ascension into heaven, when they inquired if he would at that time restore the kingdom of Israel by liberating the Jews from the Roman yoke.

How must Jesus Christ have suffered in his intercourse with beings so earthly-minded, so unacquainted with spiritual things! Yet he treated them with invariable kindness, and never lost courage at the difficulty of eradicating their deeply-seated prejudices. He knew that the time would come when his fondest wishes for them should be realized, and he patiently waited its arrival. As grace had in store its appointed hour for their conversion, so had it also in re-

serve a time destined, not, indeed, to exercise the virtue of Christ through the defects of his apostles, but to teach us how to exercise our own under similar trials. He never spared his instructions, although he saw no apparent fruit, nor even immediate prospect of fruit, from them. When his ambitious followers expressed their desire of the first places in his kingdom he asked if they could drink of the cup of his humiliation. When they disputed to discover who was the greatest among them—that is, the highest in his favor—he called a child, placed it in the midst, and said that he who should humble himself as that child should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. On every occasion he inculcated humility, both by word and example.

He explained to them in private the meaning of the parables he spoke in public; and if he sometimes reproached them with their want of intelligence, it was not to hurt their feelings or evince displeasure, but to elevate their minds and stimulate their attention. His condescension towards them was extreme; to us it appears incomprehensible, when we reflect who was the Master and who were the disciples. How low he must have stooped to attain a level with their comprehension! With how many questions they must have overwhelmed him, allowing them, as

he did, to propose their doubts, and treating them invariably with so much familiarity ! What caution he must have used to avoid offending and discouraging them ! What perseverance in repeating again and again the same truths, which were often as little understood the last time as the first ! What generosity in assuming their defence when unjustly accused by their enemies ! He had no reserve, no secrets with them. “ All things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you ” (St. John xv. 15). He called them his friends, his beloved children ; and on all occasions, but particularly in his last discourse, addressed them in terms of the warmest affection. O miracle of goodness and humility in the Man-God !

Once only he sharply reprimanded St. Peter, calling him Satan, and telling him that he was a scandal to him, relishing not the things of God but the things of the earth. The apostle had loudly confessed Jesus to be the Son of the living God, yet a moment after he was shocked at hearing the Saviour foretell his approaching Passion, and, having drawn him aside, he reproached him with submitting to such degradation. This it was which drew on St. Peter the reprehension of Christ ; he wished to correct the misguided zeal and blind affection of the apostle, and to show him how ill he corresponded with the grace just

granted him by thus allowing human feeling to triumph only an instant after he had risen superior to human feeling in the public confession of the Redeemer's Divinity.

Oh ! you who are called by Providence to the direction of souls, study this portion of the life of Christ with deep attention ; overlook not the smallest circumstance thereof, and continually apply the lesson to yourselves. The superiority you possess, in virtue of your ministry, over the souls you direct is, after all, but a partial communication of the authority of Jesus Christ, the Master and Director by excellence, in whom resided the source and plenitude of that authority. Reflect profoundly on the meekness, charity, condescension, humility, moderation, and prudent firmness which accompanied the exercise of his, and pray for grace to exert yours in the same spirit. The more intimately acquainted you are with the nature and characteristic qualities of sanctity, the farther you have advanced in holiness, the more readily will you perceive the defects, the more forcibly will you be struck with the gross and worldly notions of those whom Providence guides to you for direction ; the more also will you revolt against those defects. But can your lights, your sanctity, bear comparison with those of Jesus Christ ? Overlook the faults and imperfections of your neighbor, as your

Saviour overlooked those of his apostles ; bear with others as he bore with them ; persevere in your efforts to correct and instruct, and never lose courage because they do not at once understand your exhortations and renounce their bad habits. You are so full of zeal for their perfection that you grieve and repine if they do not advance ; yet your zeal is but a spark from the glowing fire which consumed the heart of Jesus. He desired the progress of his apostles with inexpressible ardor ; did he lose patience, did he despair, at seeing how little fruit his instructions produced ? He saw from afar, and patiently waited for the moment marked out by grace ; do you the same, and preserve your peace until it shall arrive.

What supernatural art, what Divine wisdom, what unalterable patience, are necessary to temper firmness with condescension ; the bitterness of reprehension with the heavenly sweetness of charity ; to distinguish between the necessity for reproof at one time, for forbearance at another ; to make allowance for imperfection without encouraging it ; to assume the level of all capacities, to become a child with children, to adapt the nature of the lesson to the measure of the comprehension ; to avoid precipitation ; to second and co-operate with, but never anticipate, the operations of grace ; to embrace nobly all the

difficulty, all the weariness, all the annoyance attached to the direction of souls !

None can succeed in the painful task who listen to the suggestions of human feeling, who indulge natural character, who are not determined to sacrifice, to forget, to die to self.

It is not enough to renounce all mercenary and interested views, to rise superior to ambition and vain-glory, to trample on human respect, and to direct your zeal indiscriminately to all, without exception of persons. Unless you labor to clothe yourself with Jesus Christ, unless you be actuated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, unless you embrace the practice of each and every virtue exhibited in the conduct of Jesus Christ towards his apostles, you will be but an imperfect director. The science of sanctity can be taught but by those who not only make it their study but have even advanced far through its intricacies.

The soul who seeks a guide similar to the one I have now described must not imagine she can discover him by her own efforts. Let her pray to Jesus Christ to lead her to a man according to his own heart ; if the petition be made in sincerity it will infallibly be granted, and that with an accompanying conviction of security admitting of no doubt. Her great duty will then be to open her heart to him without reserve, to listen to his words, and implicitly to obey his

directions. Should she notice in him any defects (for what saint is free from imperfection, and where is that imperfection more apparent than in direction?), she should be persuaded that he either does not observe them, or else that he regrets and labors to correct them. She should bear with them as a trial of her virtue, and never suffer them to weaken the confidence and obedience she owes her guide.

CHAPTER XXIX.

COMMON LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST.

ONE of the most admirable points in the life of Christ, and one, at the same time, of the most contrary to our ideas, is the nature of the duties which engrossed every moment of that life; they were of the most ordinary kind, and, as they were the choice of a God, it follows that a common life must be the most perfect. We are too much accustomed to regulate our notions of sanctity by the striking external features which sometimes accompany it. We can scarcely fancy a man to be a saint unless he excites our wonder by his total seclusion from the world—his fasting, watching, and austerity. So thought the Jews, who, when they witnessed the self-imposed rigors of the Baptist, clothed as he was in a garment of

camel's hair and feeding on locusts and wild honey, at once acknowledged him for a prophet, quite ready even to recognize him as the Messias.

Such also are our ideas of sanctity. It is, no doubt, true that external evidences of holiness may be looked on as a sign of its real existence; yet they are at best an equivocal sign. Great austerity is not always an indication of sanctity, whereas eminent sanctity may exist without the practice of remarkable austerity. The true and real spirit of sanctity resides in the heart; God alone can see and appreciate it; men know nothing of it; they can pronounce on it only from conjecture, and, generally speaking, are totally incapable of pronouncing on it at all. Thus it was that the Jews erred in their opinion of Jesus Christ, because, seeing nothing in his life to distinguish him from the rest of men, they could not bring their minds to believe him the Messias and Son of God.

For thirty years he had lived in a poor workshop, engaged in a mean trade, subsisting by the labor of his hands, and giving no evidence of what he really was. It is true that before the commencement of his public career he accomplished a miraculous fast of forty days, but then that occurred in the desert, where none were by to witness the prodigy. When he began to preach he appeared in a poor and simple but not

a singular garb; he and his disciples lived abstemiously, but they did not fast; the Pharisees carried their austerity farther in this respect, and the followers of John were so astonished and even scandalized at the fact as to inquire of him the reason of the difference. He never refused invitations to the tables of the rich, whether Pharisees or publicans, and there ate and drank without the affectation of singularity. Neither did he attract notice by devoting a long time to public prayer like the Pharisees, whom he reproaches with doing so, but ever practised what he so much inculcated, prayer in secret. He indiscriminately received all who approached him; his air, his deportment, his words, his whole person, breathed only the most perfect simplicity; and if he gained respect and attracted followers it was by no display of those external endowments which are so apt to win the favor of the multitude.

This ordinary and unobtrusive style of life was in strict accordance with the humility of his heart; it served as a veil to his sanctity; it exercised the faith of his disciples, and taught them the useful art of distinguishing real from counterfeit sanctity and never allowing themselves to be imposed on by appearances. It condemned and confounded the hypocrisy of his enemies, who deceived the public by the empty shadow of

piety while their hearts were a prey to the lowest and worst of passions.

In aiming at sanctity each individual should consult the peculiar call of grace, and take into consideration the especial duties which God has allotted to him according to his condition in life. The astonishing penance and austerities practised by some saints under the inspiration of divine grace should never be condemned; yet it is essential to attend to the following recommendations: First, to limit our admiration of these holy excesses within certain bounds, lest they produce too strong an impression on the imagination, and neither to propose to imitate them nor to look on them as an indispensable requisite to sanctity. Secondly, whether we embrace the practice of great corporal mortification or not, to attach ourselves principally to interior virtues, these being the essence of sanctity, and all the rest a mere appendage, which can be separated from the spirit without detriment to either. Thirdly, as far as the choice depends on ourselves, to prefer a common life, in order the more perfectly to imitate Jesus Christ, to preserve humility, to guard against pride, which loves singularity, and to render virtue attractive to our neighbor, instead of prejudicing him against it by presenting it to his view encumbered with almost endless exterior practices.

The common life is so called because it enters into the common order of Providence, and is compatible with all the various conditions which compose society. It requires neither uncommon strength of body, extraordinary help from God, nor utter seclusion in the cloister or the desert. The common life can be admirably allied with the spirit of prayer, habitual recollection, detachment from created things, union with God, charity towards our neighbor—in a word, the most sublime virtues of Christianity; and it has the advantage of serving as a shield against the applause of men and the temptations of our own vanity. Generally speaking, interior souls have a preference for the common life; they never voluntarily renounce it; they dread nothing so much as any appearance of singularity in their exterior conduct, and if God leads them through extraordinary ways they are most careful to conceal the fact from human observation.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE MANNER IN WHICH JESUS RECEIVED
SINNERS.

JESUS CHRIST was sanctity itself. As God he had an infinite horror of sin; as man he was impeccable, and hated sin with all the hatred

which God himself could inspire for it. Yet we learn from the Gospel that his conduct towards sinners was characterized by a degree of tenderness which astonishes and almost shocks us. But let us assume the position of those sinners, and we shall feel how much we stand in need of similar lenity ; our astonishment will vanish, and we shall learn more compassion and indulgence for human misery.

In order the more fully to enter into the sentiments of Jesus Christ, and as it were to justify his conduct in this particular, we must distinguish two sorts of sinners : those who fall from frailty and those who fall through malice. The former are drawn into sin through the consequences of a bad education, or they are carried away by the violence of passion, or led on by circumstances, or conquered by the force of habit ; they scarcely reflect on the act committed ; when they do reflect they condemn it, they reproach themselves for it, they do not seek to excuse it, they regret it, they wish never to repeat it, but have not strength to carry their feeble desires into effect. The second plan and prepare their sins in the heart ; they either seek opportunities of sin or joyfully seize on those they encounter ; they commit sin with full deliberation ; they silence the remorse which follows it ; they try to justify it, or at least to extenuate its guilt ; they

shroud their souls in the veil of voluntary blindness; they persevere in sin; they harden their souls in guilt. Jesus Christ knew well the dispositions of both; the former he received with kindness, not only allowing but even inviting them to approach him; conversing and eating with them; nay, asking permission to abide with them, as in the case of Zacheus. But the Gospel presents no record of his having thus treated the second sort, and this not because he failed in sincere compassion for them, but because they obstinately resisted grace and voluntarily closed their eyes against the light.

What was the object of the Son of God in coming on earth? Was it to exercise judgment against sinners? He himself assures us of the contrary, declaring that he had come to seek and to save that which was lost (St. Luke xix. 10). When reproached for having eaten with publicans and sinners he replied: "They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill." He referred his accusers to the declaration of God himself: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," and proclaimed that he had "not come to call the just," that is, those who like the Pharisees were puffed up with the idea of their own excellence, "but sinners" (St. Matt. ix. 11, 12, 13). What was the course which naturally suggested itself to the Divine Teacher who had

descended from heaven to ransom a guilty world? Was it not to announce in his exhortations and to manifest in his conduct the great mercies of the Lord? Was not the reconciliation of men with his eternal Father a work well worthy of an incarnate God? And to effect this reconciliation was it not necessary that he should attract them by his affability? that he should gain their confidence by his kindness? that he should second the secret operations of grace by the persuasive influence of his amiability? His external demonstrations were but the echo of his internal feelings, and before he announced the remission of sin as man he had already forgiven it as God. Alas! what would become of us if Jesus Christ had not retained in heaven the same sentiments which guided him on earth? Those who in defiance of his loving mercy have resolved to perish are the arbiters of their own sad destiny. Let us thank him from our hearts for his readiness to insure the eternal happiness of all who will only co-operate with his desire to save them.

Like Jesus Christ we must combine hatred of sin with compassion for the sinner. This compassion we shall not fail in if we be humble, if we be persuaded of our weakness and natural tendency to evil; if we be intimately convinced that there is no sin, however great, which we

may not commit, and that for our exemption from crimes of magnitude we are indebted only to God's preserving grace. Impressions such as these produce an altered view of the sinner's miseries; we learn to pity him when we have learned to understand our own need of the Divine pity; we learn, too, to pray that the mercy extended to us may be with him likewise, either to withdraw him from the fatal gulf or to preserve him from plunging in.

This disposition of mind is an immediate effect of charity and humility, and to me it appears one of the most important points of Christian morality. It is rarely to be met in innocent souls unless they be interior. Interior souls know themselves well, consequently they fully understand their natural capacity for evil, and their obligation to God alone for all the good they possess. Those, on the contrary, who have never sounded the depths of their native misery, and who attribute their virtues in a great measure to their own zeal, their own exertions, their own fidelity, are not animated with the same compassion for sinners, because they believe themselves very far removed from the possibility of resembling them.

But compassion for sinners does not interfere with the prudence necessary to be observed in treating with them; a point which principally

regards pastors charged with the care of souls. Encourage, support, fortify those whose faults are to be attributed only to frailty ; who are upright in heart, sorry for their transgressions, and desirous to amend. Give them every facility of approaching you with confidence and opening their hearts to you without reserve, and let them always withdraw well satisfied with you. It is not right to gratify their self-love, still less to diminish the idea they entertain of the grievousness of their faults, but it is well to bestow the consolation and encouragement they so much need. Those who sin from malice are not entitled to the same encouragement, which, indeed, they would only abuse. Consult the spirit of Jesus Christ, and it will enable you to discriminate between sins of frailty and those of malice ; it will also direct you as to the method to be pursued in both cases.

But since Jesus Christ makes so great a difference between one sinner and another, and looks in the first place to the source whence sin proceeds, we should be inexorable with ourselves regarding such faults as result from a determined will to do wrong ; whether they be in themselves little or great is not so material a point of consideration ; they are always of consequence and may lead to great excesses when committed with reflection and deliberation. We should not easily

forgive ourselves for them, for they are precisely the faults which Jesus Christ forgives least readily, and which are the greatest obstacle to our spiritual progress. Thus an uncharitable word spoken with a malicious intention is often more sinful than an injurious word uttered in the violence of momentary feeling; and again, formal resistance to grace in a trifle is more displeasing to God than a considerable fault committed inadvertently. David's crimes of adultery and murder were very different in their nature from Saul's two sins of disobedience. Both were reproached by God's prophets for their transgressions; both confessed their guilt, saying, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Kings xii. 13). Yet David recovered the friendship of the Almighty and Saul was hopelessly rejected. Whence arose the difference? In this: that the heart of the one was upright and single; that of the other not so. In no point are we more deficient in uprightness and simplicity than in the view we take of our passions and consequent sins, blinded as we are on the subject by pride and self-love. We should examine our hearts narrowly on this matter, and beg of God not to permit us to overlook anything, however trifling, which may wound his infinite sanctity. As for faults of pure frailty, when we believe in sincerity that ours are of that description, the humble acknowledgment of

them, accompanied by contrition and an earnest desire of amendment, will easily obtain pardon, nor will they render us less agreeable to God, whom nothing so much glorifies as a contrite and humble heart.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONTRARY SPIRIT OF THE PHARISEES.

ALTHOUGH Jesus was the essence of purity and holiness he freely conversed with sinful men; for as his humility was commensurate with his sanctity he was far from imagining that an intercourse with sinners, based on zeal for their conversion, could prove detrimental to his reputation. The greatest saints, especially those called to the apostolic ministry, have ever gloried in imitating their divine Model in this particular. In the exercise of their functions they too encountered opposition and calumny, but this the precepts and example of their adorable Master had fully prepared them to expect.

The haughty Pharisees arrogated to themselves pre-eminent sanctity on account of their scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law, the spirit of which they misinterpreted and disregarded. In accordance with the pride which characterized their entire conduct they carefully shunned all intercourse with the people, as their

very name implies, lest, by communicating with ordinary men, they might incur contamination and even slightly tarnish the brightness of their imaginary justice. They belonged to that class who, according to the prophet Isaias, give expression to their contempt for others in terms like the following: "Depart from me, come not near me, for thou art unclean" (Isa. lxxv. 5). Of the followers of Jesus Christ they spoke with the utmost scorn, calling them "a multitude who knew not the law, and accursed" (St. John vii. 49). To the blind man who gave testimony to the Redeemer they said reproachfully: "Thou wast wholly born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" (*Ibid.* ix. 34). Was it surprising that these proud hypocrites should take umbrage at the conduct of Jesus Christ when it so manifestly condemned their own?—that they should pervert into a crime his affability in associating with publicans, and assign his condescension to sinners as a reason for denying him the title of a prophet, although experience had so often demonstrated his supernatural power of reading their inmost souls? "And the Pharisee who had invited him spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner" (St. Luke vii. 39). Jesus well knew she had been a

sinner, but he also knew that in sincerity of heart she was now a convert, as is evident from his exposition of the secret thoughts at that moment passing in the mind of Simon. It was their reliance on his indulgence to sinners which induced the Pharisees to appeal to his decision in the case of the woman convicted of adultery; for they hoped to surprise him into a violation of the law which decreed to that crime the penalty of death. But Jesus, who penetrated their malice, defeated it by referring them to the guilty state of their own erroneous consciences. "He that is without sin among you," said he, "let him first cast a stone at her" (St. John viii. 7). And when they had retired he pardoned the now humbled and contrite criminal, saying: "Go, and now sin no more" (*Ibid.* 11).

The remission of sin was the exclusive privilege of a Man-God: his title to that exalted prerogative he had sustained by the most stupendous miracles, but he never exercised the power until he had imparted to the sinner the necessary preparatory dispositions. It was worthy of a God to pardon contrite souls whose repentance emanated from perfect charity; and nothing could be more consistent with his mercy than his declaration in favor of the sinful Magdalene: "Many sins are forgiven her because she hath

loved much " (St. Luke vii. 47). Maxims and facts like these could not be controverted by the Pharisees; what, then, but his benevolence could have excited their indignation against Jesus Christ? And how did his benevolence offend them? Because it formed too strong a contrast with their own domineering arrogance and inflexible austerity — dispositions originating in vain-glory and self-love. They aspired only to the reputation of sanctity with its consequent temporal advantages, and were therefore compared by Christ to "whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all filthiness" (St. Matt. xxiii. 27).

The spirit of the Pharisees was not confined to themselves, but has, unhappily, been transmitted to Christians of our own times, among whom it is daily exemplified. The separation of heretics from the Church of Christ, both in early and recent ages, is attributable solely to their overweening pride, and, having once forsaken the fold, they became self-constituted reformers merely in order to invest their errors with the semblance of truth. But, without recurring to so glaring an evidence of mental blindness, we may confidently assert that the spirit of the Pharisees more or less prevails among Catholics themselves, and even among the declared pro-

fessors of piety, who seek to accommodate the service of God with their own perverted ideas of duty, and tenaciously adhere to the suggestions of private opinion in their erroneous estimate of heavenly things. The pharisaical spirit is, in fact, identical with man's inordinate attachment to private judgment, both being equally the offspring of pride. There exists, no doubt, in the minds of many a mistaken commiseration for sinners; but it generally results less from pride than from natural softness of character, ill-directed goodness of heart, extreme lenity towards self, and presumptuous reliance on the Divine mercy. In condemning one extreme great care should be taken to avoid the other; the former leads infallibly to equal, or rather to greater, disorders than the latter; it is incomparably more dangerous, and therefore it was that Jesus Christ opposed it so energetically, although he foresaw he should be the victim of his own zeal.

To observe the medium is difficult unless to the interior soul, who is guided, both as regards her own conduct and her intercourse with others, by the Spirit of Christ. The diversity of dispositions is endless, and unless much caution be observed the Gospel morality is liable to be understood and interpreted according to the bent of each peculiar mind. Under one aspect it

appears to favor rigor and severity, under another to authorize lenity and indulgence; it is certain that Christian prudence consists in reconciling this apparent inconsistency and in equally avoiding each extreme. But how rarely is that discretion exercised, either in the regulation of our own conduct or in the direction of others! It is a gratuitous gift of God seldom bestowed upon any but interior souls.

If our conclusions were founded on the suggestions of natural character alone, and always directed by unprejudiced views and upright intentions, the evil would be neither great nor irremediable. Saints have occasionally transgressed the due limits of rigor, both in the guidance of their neighbor and in their own regard; others, on the contrary, equally holy, have been known to exceed in indulgence, extended, however, far more liberally to their fellow-creatures than to themselves. In both cases the extremes resulted from a natural impulse, which had not been duly subjected to the controlling influence of the Spirit of God, but neither their own sanctification nor that of their neighbor was materially impeded in consequence. The case is, however, altered when human reason is permitted to assume dominion and add its dictates to the influence of natural character. False principles of morality being then established by pride and self-love, a

peculiar plan of conduct is adopted and tenaciously adhered to, and to this erroneous system not only the individual with whom it originates but all men in general must ultimately conform. Any deviation from it is censured and condemned ; attachment to private opinion, pride, obstinacy, and wilful spiritual blindness succeed one another ; envy, jealousy, and other similar unworthy passions acquire an ascendancy, while severe criticism and rash judgment are followed by slander, calumny, and the most frightful excesses. If in this state of feeling ambition, vain-glory, self-interest, or any such worldly or criminal objects be pursued all means of attaining the desired end appear lawful, and every effort to exalt self and depreciate rivals is invariably covered with the veil of hypocrisy and disguised under the pretext of promoting God's glory. Of this we have an instance in the conduct of the Pharisees, who, in condemning Jesus Christ to death as an impostor, gloried in the crime, as in a great service rendered to God. The sad truth has again been exemplified by many laborers in Christ's vineyard, who, after generously devoting themselves to the salvation of souls in foreign lands, were unhappily led to calumniate and defame each other and even to proclaim their dissensions through the medium of the public courts, quite indifferent to the dreadful scandal

thence inevitably resulting. The same spirit has likewise been displayed by entire religious communities, or at least the greater proportion of their members, who not merely triumphed at the destruction of an order, assailed from its birth by heresy, libertinism, and impiety, but even contributed to its fall by intrigue and calumny, flattering themselves that once free from competitors they should engross public favor, instead of more wisely considering the suppression of the rival order as a sure forerunner of their own impending ruin. The violent contentions between religious bodies who vie for precedency in the ministry, thus seeking to appropriate the glory which belongs to God, may be renewed with equal acrimony, though less publicity, between private individuals.

Natural character, intellectual pride, passion inflamed by self-esteem, these are the fruitful source of so many perils to the soul, both as regards her own salvation and the exercise of her zeal for others, that if the interior life offered no other advantage than a security against such dangers this should assuredly produce a generous determination to embrace it. The interior life cannot subsist without self-denial, and the greater that self-denial the greater also is the soul's progress in perfection. It is evident that the dominion of natural disposition, if not alto-

gether overthrown, is at least daily undermined in those who study the difficult lesson of self-denial; such souls will therefore gradually attain the medium between excessive severity and indulgence. The subjugation of their natural character will necessarily lead to the renunciation of private judgment, the love of which is equally inherent in every mortal; that being immolated, neither their own aspirations after holiness nor their plans for the direction of others can be any longer subservient to its dictates, but their sole plan and aspiration will be to treasure and humbly follow the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. They will perpetually study self-renunciation; they will recur, when necessary, to the counsels of others; they will carefully examine into their faults, and assiduously correct them when discovered. To deny self is to renounce human views, to sacrifice every object which tends to irritate the passions, and to pursue pride even to its last stronghold. Those who have achieved such victories, who have seriously undertaken the war against self, who unceasingly strive to mortify and humble nature, are incapable of an emotion of jealousy at the sanctity or success of others. Provided God be glorified, no matter by what instrument, they are happy, and if permitted to select the means of promoting His glory in their own persons, they would choose

such as are most humiliating and most calculated to lead to self-abnegation. Such souls are exempt from the slightest tincture of the pharisaical spirit, and the more rapidly they advance in the interior life, the more certain they are of escaping its contaminating influence.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JESUS WEEPS OVER JERUSALEM.

THE tender compassion of Jesus for sinners was not limited to the humble and repenting; it extended even to his personal enemies, although the daily increase of their hatred and malevolence rendered their conversion hopeless. Jerusalem was to pronounce his death-sentence; the heads of the nation and the populace were to concur in demanding his crucifixion and praying that his blood might fall on them and on their children. The hour in which the Deicide was to be consummated drew near. Jesus foresaw the crime and its consequences, and his soul was plunged in anguish at the sight. Casting his eyes on the hapless city, he exclaimed, with tears, "If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace: but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the days shall come upon thee: and thy enemies

shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side. And beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee: and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation" (St. Luke xix. 42, 44). How intense the love which filled the Saviour's heart while his lips uttered the fearful prediction! He wept over the temporal calamities to be inflicted on the Jews as the well-merited punishment of their wilful blindness and impenitence. He deplored the destruction of the once-favored nation and its permanent dispersion among the tribes of the earth. He grieved yet more over the spiritual miseries entailed by their obduracy, over the eternal perdition of so many souls, for whom his blood would be shed in vain. And to what does he attribute the woes of Jerusalem? To her not recognizing at the time, marked out by God the things that were for her peace, nor the period of her visitation. That period had embraced the years of his public life, during which he had left nothing undone or unsaid to open the eyes of his people and to induce, nay, almost compel them to acknowledge him as the Messias. Interior grace had been lavished, exterior prodigies had been vouchsafed, and all was vain. "How often," said he, "would I have gathered together thy

children as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not" (St. Matt. xxiii. 37).

The lamentations of Jesus Christ over Jerusalem extended to all sinners who in the course of time should transgress his law and resist his grace. Their spiritual welfare was no less dear to him than that of the Jews, and although they were exempt from a participation in the temporal miseries of that devoted race—the more terrible because eternal doom impended over them—was no less calculated to arouse the compassion of his loving heart. How profound the abyss of anguish in which his soul was ever immersed! Oh, who can fathom its depth?

The truly devoted servants of Jesus Christ participate in these his interior pangs, and like him, though in a different degree, commiserate the wretched fate of those who daily perish eternally. How unceasing the petitions they offer at the throne of mercy, how severe the penance they embrace, how painful the privations they freely endure to obtain the salvation of those for whom Jesus died! While men of ordinary piety restrict their zeal and exertions within the circumscribed boundaries of personal interest these generous beings, devoted to the glory of God, and breathing only the spirit of Jesus Christ, embrace in their vast desires the conversion of

the universe. Nothing so sensibly afflicts them as the sad conviction that God is not known, loved, and served by all creatures, and that for countless generations the Saviour's precious blood has flowed in vain.

What death to self, what disinterestedness, what ardor for God's glory and zeal for souls this noble disposition implies ! It is, no doubt, the pure emanation of perfect charity ; but how rarely is that perfect charity to be found except among interior souls ? Ordinary virtue cannot develop sentiments so exalted ! it does not aim at or even understand them ; they must be inspired by God himself ; their source is in the adorable heart of Jesus, and in that Divine school alone can they be imbibed ; but how few pursue the path leading to that sacred sanctuary ! The generality approach it to treat of their own concerns, with utter indifference to the interests of their fellow-creatures ; as if it were possible to please and imitate Jesus Christ without participating in his solicitude for the objects of his most tender and anxious love !

Christ declared that the woes of Jerusalem proceeded from her ignorance of the time of her visitation ; words of deep meaning and worthy of serious consideration. For every soul are prepared critical moments and decisive circumstances, which exert a direct influence on her

conversion from sin, or on her entrance into and perseverance in the career of perfection. At this period of her spiritual existence God calls her to his service with peculiar earnestness and makes use of different means to obtain dominion over her heart; sometimes inspiring insupportable remorse for past sin; sometimes proposing and facilitating a heroic act of virtue; sometimes requiring sacrifices and trials very repugnant to nature. Sometimes, again, he attaches his grace to external agents, as an illness, a humiliation, an affliction, a sermon, a book, a conversation. If the soul resist the heavenly call—as she is always free to do—no hope remains of retracting her fatal determination; she will persevere in a course either of sin or tepidity, and her death will correspond with her life. If, on the contrary, she yields obedience to the voice of God she will rise from sin to virtue, or ascend from virtue to a higher degree of perfection. On her fidelity in this instance depends not only her conversion but her perseverance.

Now, we cannot clearly discern the circumstances which exert so decided an influence on salvation or perfection; God conceals them that we may be ever vigilant, ever careful to profit of each grace bestowed. There surely can be no stronger incentive to undeviating fidelity than this reflection: “God visits my soul at this mo-

ment by his grace, and I know not whether this shall be my last; I cannot tell whether by neglecting the present admonition I forfeit my salvation. God solicits the unreserved donation of my being, that he may reward the gift by imparting to me a more intimate knowledge of himself. If I refuse will he repeat the invitation, or will it be accompanied with equal earnestness? I cannot say, but I have every reason to apprehend the contrary. Should he desist from the pursuit the entrance to perfection is irrevocably closed against me. I have for some time been leading a spiritual life and have made an advance in virtue. Suddenly an obstacle is to be overcome, an important step taken, a temptation resisted, a trial endured. God interiorly urges me to fidelity, while at the same time nature struggles for the mastery. If I yield to nature I have no security that I shall ever regain the ascendancy; my career of holiness will be suddenly arrested; I shall advance no farther, and there is much danger that I shall go back. How far shall I recede? I cannot tell; perhaps I shall renounce perfection altogether; perhaps I shall lose my soul. In this uncertainty my most secure plan is to recognize the visit of the Lord in each impression of grace I experience, and faithfully and generously to execute all it requires." The melancholy fate of the Jews

forcibly illustrates the danger of undervaluing those critical moments on which depended their recognition or rejection of the Messiah. Those who took no heed of the precious day of Heaven's visitation afterwards refused to credit the astounding miracles which bore testimony to the divinity of Christ, and finally crucified the Son of God as a blasphemer. This unfortunate example is unfortunately too often renewed, not only in the case of individuals, but even of entire nations, for we all more or less resemble the Jews, and the Almighty is at all times guided by similar rules in the distribution of his graces.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PRAYER OF JESUS CHRIST.

JESUS CHRIST being particularly our model in prayer, that great source of heaven's blessings, we should endeavor, with his grace, to form an idea of his manner of praying as a necessary preliminary to its imitation. I shall therefore devote a few pages to this important subject, under the guidance of the light it may please him to communicate to me.

The prayer of Jesus Christ was perpetual, uninterrupted, even momentarily, either by exterior action or by the necessary repose which nature

demand; nevertheless there were fixed periods which he devoted exclusively to prayer, withdrawing at those times from his disciples, and retiring to some secluded spot to converse alone with God. The Gospel says "that rising very early, going out, he went into a desert place, and there he prayed" (St. Mark i. 35). On another occasion that, "having dismissed the multitude, he went up into a mountain alone to pray. And that when it was evening he was still there alone"; that he left it only "at the fourth watch of the night"—that is, about three o'clock in the morning—when he rejoined his disciples (St. Matt. xiv. 23, 25). Before he chose his apostles "he went out into a mountain to pray, and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God" (St. Luke vi. 12). St. Luke observes, that being at Jerusalem, a short time before his Passion, "in the day-time he was teaching in the temple; but at night, going out, he abode in the mount that is called Olivet. And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple to hear him" (St. Luke xxi. 37, 38). He had spent three hours in prayer in the garden of Gethsemani when Judas and the Jews came to seize him. "Judas knew the place, because Jesus had often resorted thither, together with his disciples" (St. John xviii. 2). Thus, throughout his public career, having devoted the day to the

service of his Father, he spent the greater portion and sometimes the whole of the night in converse with him. During his private life his practice, no doubt, was likewise to abridge the repose of night by hours of prayer, after consecrating the day to the duties of his poor calling.

From this example we learn that prayer is the first duty of the Christian ; that whatever be our condition in life, whatever our avocations, we should always find time for this holy exercise ; that it is above all indispensable for those engaged in promoting the spiritual good of their neighbor ; that well-regulated charity forbids that exclusive attention to the souls of others which shall interfere with the care of our own, and that none who neglect to invoke the Divine blessing on their ministry by prayer can effectually promote the eternal interests of their fellow-beings. Unfortunately we do not love and value prayer, we do not understand its necessity, and therefore it is that we find little or no time for it, while we have ample leisure for every other pursuit, even for mere amusement and frivolity.

Jesus Christ did not pray for himself, for he had no spiritual wants ; he required no grace, the plenitude of grace abiding in him ; he needed no manifestation of the Divine mercy, being impec-

cable; he had no temptations to conquer, no virtues to acquire; what, then, was it which prompted him to pray? Love for his Father; zeal for his Father's glory. The surpassing favor of union with the Divinity had been conferred on his soul at the moment of its creation, and his perpetual aim was farther to cement that union by free acts of love and devotion. Prayer was the life of Jesus Christ; he never interrupted it, except when the will of his eternal Father assigned the substitution of exterior action, and no sooner was he at liberty to choose his occupation than he quickly returned to this his centre. Next to the glory of God the great end of his prayer was the salvation of men. Not a grace is bestowed on the just or sinful which Christ did not ask and obtain during his mortal life. Alone with his Father, he treated of the spiritual wants of all men indiscriminately, as well those who are saved as those who voluntarily perish, and his mind and heart embraced in one comprehensive but distinct view the peculiar wants and miseries of every individual of the human species.

Our multiplied spiritual infirmities imperatively oblige us to pray for ourselves; they so forcibly urge their claims when we appear before God that it is not possible to lose sight of them altogether, and even though we should have attained

such perfect abandonment to Providence as to refrain from presenting any specific petition connected with self, we still are always influenced in prayer by a general desire to obtain the relief of our necessities. It would be either insupportable presumption or extravagant disinterestedness to imagine that we have no need to pray for ourselves, or that such an omission is an evidence of perfection. The soul may, indeed, lose sight of herself and all distinct views in that species of prayer wherein the operations of God alone are perceptible; this state is common even with beginners. But when left free to form acts at her own selection, her individual welfare should form one of their specific objects. On the other hand, to limit our views to personal interest, losing sight of that of God and our neighbor, although an ordinary practice, is undoubtedly a reprehensible one, decidedly opposed to the intentions and example of Christ, and pursued only at the instigation of self-love.

Prayer is generally understood to include merely a petition to God; but should it not be viewed under many other aspects? Is it not an ecstasy of admiration and love at the consideration of God's majesty and perfections? Does it not comprise adoration, praise, thanksgiving, oblation, desire that God be adored and served, regret that he is not known and loved as he de-

serves? Is it not really excellent when the glory of God is its immediate object? And should we not likewise admit the influence of that divine precept of fraternal love which demands that we promote our fellow-creatures' interests with as much earnestness as our own? Have we nothing to ask for our parents, friends, and benefactors; for our brethren, the children of the church; for heretics and schismatics; for infidels and idolaters, strangers to the very name of Jesus Christ? We do not perhaps formally exclude our neighbor from our petitions, yet, chiefly engrossed with self, we seldom think of laying before our Almighty Father the wants of that great family of which we are members. Where, then, is our charity for our neighbor? What should be the primary object of that charity if not his salvation, and at what time shall we prove it if it have no influence in directing the aspirations of our heart in prayer? How erroneous the maxim, that each person's supplications should be confined to his own necessities! How forcibly condemned by Jesus Christ! I maintain that none pray effectually for themselves who neglect to pray for their neighbor; that none can love their fellow-creatures with a supernatural love and at the same time omit to pray for them, and that to fail in love for the children of God is to fail in love for God himself.

What was the nature of Christ's prayer? Was it composed of many distinct words and specific acts? When he prayed in public he certainly did use such acts, in order to discover to us his interior sentiments and to render his prayer practically instructive. He likewise taught us a short and simple form of vocal prayer, which includes all that a Christian can and ought to ask in his own name and the name of his fellow-creatures, as well for the glory of God as for the relief of his own spiritual and temporal wants. Yet Jesus Christ did not intend that we should confine ourselves to vocal prayer, as if God could discern the desires of the heart only after the lips had given them expression. Public prayer must necessarily be vocal, but not so with private prayer, the silent communion of the soul alone with God. When Christ thus conversed with his Father his prayer was usually confined to the interior, though doubtless the affections of his soul occasionally found vent in sighs, tears, and words. One truth is incontestable, viz., that his prayer ever emanated from the heart, and that God will accept none from us unless it flow from the same source. This is the essential point, after which it belongs to the spirit of God to direct the soul as to the method of prayer, suggesting either forms of vocal supplication or silent annihilation in the Divine Presence.

Did Jesus Christ meditate methodically, exercising the three powers of his soul by rule on a given subject, pre-arranged and divided into distinct points? No; such systems were first laid down by men and quite unknown to the primitive Christians. They certainly may be temporarily used with benefit, but it is a mistake to suppose them indispensable; the grace of God is above all method; to subject it to invariable rules would be to restrain its divine operation. A director who should admit but one method of prayer, and compel all under his guidance to adopt it, would subject the action of God's spirit to the control of the creature's will, feed the natural activity of the human mind, rob prayer of its most excellent effects, impede the advancement of the soul, restricting her within a degree of perfection far beneath that to which the unrestrained grace of God would elevate her, and finally destroy the conformity between the prayer of the Christian and that of his model Jesus Christ.

The prayer of Christ was, no doubt, peculiar to himself, being that of a soul inseparably united to the person of the Word; that of an infinite Being who, although incapable in his Divine nature of presenting a petition to God, yet deigned to identify with himself, as in nowise derogatory to his dignity, that prayer of which his

sacred humanity was the organ. It belongs not to created intellect to fathom the secrets of that prayer or to soar to the comprehension of its mysterious sublimity. All that can be said is, that during prayer the soul of Christ was more deeply engulfed in the ocean of the Divinity; that it was in a manner annihilated by the overpowering majesty of God, and that the aid of Omnipotence was then requisite to sustain its sinking faculties. The ecstatic transports of a soul borne by the power of God beyond the earth and beyond herself; the beatitude of the heavenly spirits; the unclouded vision of the Divine essence, with the love and the bliss accompanying it, all give but a faint idea of the sensations experienced by Jesus Christ at prayer. That prayer we know by faith to have been beatifying in a supreme degree; but Jesus Christ was pleased habitually to suspend by miracle the effect of the hypostatical union whence he derived his sovereign happiness, limiting its influence to the superior part of his soul, seldom, and only for short intervals, permitting it to extend to the inferior. Therefore, though he at all times possessed the perfection of supernatural felicity, an attribute inseparable from his nature, he yet voluntarily and perpetually renounced the sensible enjoyment of its consoling impressions.

This observation leads to the development of

another truth, unknown to the generality of Christians, and disclosed to interior souls themselves only when destined for victims of Divine love. This truth is, that the prayer of Jesus Christ, far from abounding in heavenly sweetness, was, on the contrary, replete with bitterness and anguish, though always full of peace. That he entered on it in the disposition of a criminal, laden with the sins of mortals; a debtor, accountable for the long-accumulating arrears of human guilt; a culprit, indebted to the divine justice for the punishment due to all generations of men; a victim of expiation, on whose devoted head was to fall the rigor of the vengeance due to the guilty sons of Adam. The terrors of Divine wrath were unfolded to him while he prayed, his Father then assuming the aspect of an inexorable judge who decreed torments and ignominy for his obedient Son, and seemed to reject him from his presence as an object of malediction. If he cast a glance on himself he beheld the terrible array of human crime which enveloped him as a loathsome garment, and he shrank from the appalling vision with horror as great as if he had been the real perpetrator of those crimes. How lively his contrition for those multitudinous iniquities which he embraced in one distinct view, and detested in proportion to their enormity! What a contrast between his personal sanctity

and the accumulation of human guilt, forming one revolting mass of hideous leprosy! How deep his anguish for the insults offered to the Godhead! How bitter the pangs by which, even in anticipation of his cross, he sought to repair those insults! How overwhelming his sorrow when he contemplated the myriads who, in defiance of his love, would rush on to perdition, trample on the graces purchased by his blood, and prepare for themselves a deeper hell than that from which he endeavored to extricate them!

Sensitive souls, who so eagerly thirst for heavenly consolation as to approach to God with no other view than to taste its sweetness, yielding to despondency if the food your self-love craves be withheld, can you contrast your sentiments with those of Jesus Christ, and not blush at the disparity? His sanctity incontestibly entitled him to all imaginable consolation, yet this he neither sought nor found in prayer, and what do you deserve and desire? Are you worthy of a glance from God? When he deigns to look on you should you not sink into the depths of your nothingness? should not your heart overflow with gratitude? should you not feel that, in appearing to withdraw from you, he treats you strictly according to your deserts? Should you not value and cherish the mortifying humiliations supplied by his love?

Go to the school of Jesus Christ, there to learn the nature of that really excellent prayer which most perfectly glorifies God and most effectually insures the progress of the soul. You will find it to be that which most closely resembles his own; that in which the soul is immolated not only in desire but in reality; that in which she is overwhelmed by the combined weight of God's majesty and her own abjection, his sanctity and her corruption; that in which she is penetrated with regret for the insults offered by herself and her fellow-creatures to her Maker; that in which she devotes herself as a loving victim of satisfaction to Divine justice, too happy that the Almighty deigns to accept her holocaust in union with that of his adorable Son!

You eagerly aspire to the joys of Thabor, but you never reflect that the wondrous vision vanished with the rapidity of lightning; that the intention of Jesus Christ in displaying its glories was to enliven the faith and fortify the courage of his disciples, not to promote his own comfort or exaltation; that his approaching Passion formed his only topic of conversation with Moses and Elias; and that St. Peter, who, in the excess of enjoyment, would gladly have fixed his permanent dwelling on the mount, is spoken of in the Gospel as "not knowing what he said" (St. Mark ix. 5).

The truly devoted imitators of Jesus Christ ambition no prayer but such as is conformable to that of their Lord and Model, and are never happier than when theirs leads to humiliation and mental or corporal suffering. Prayer should be ever distrusted when it fails to produce self-renunciation and detachment even from spiritual consolations.


CHAPTER XXXIV.

LOVE OF JESUS FOR THE CROSS.

THE repeated declaration of Christ, that only those who bear his cross shall be accounted his disciples, is not a mere empty form of expression. The cross, comprising not alone the material instrument of his violent death but all the interior and exterior sufferings of his life, was ever the fondly cherished object of his affections. It was presented to him on his assumption of human nature, and he accepted it, not merely with resignation, but with generous love and joy; he embraced it with a noble heart, and adopted it as his inseparable companion through life and in death. He foresaw the circumstances attendant on his cross, with their mutual connection and gradual succession; he anticipated the persecution which his doctrine and example would entail; he knew to what lengths the malicious hatred of

his enemies would lead them ; these facts he frequently foretold to his apostles ; yet his first determination never wavered, but with a firm and resolute step he advanced perpetually towards the goal of his mortal career, the blood-stained cross ever distinctly visible in the distance. He sometimes fled and concealed himself, it is true ; however, the act was suggested not by timorous anxiety to evade the fury of his persecutors but by unwillingness to anticipate " his hour, which was not yet come " (St. John vii. 30). When it did arrive he boldly went forward to meet his foes and resigned himself to their power.

St. Peter, who could not listen with composure to Christ's prediction of his ignominious death, in forcible terms remonstrated against it ; but how strongly did Jesus reprove this manifestation of his apostle's mistaken love, repulsing him as if he had been the tempter in human form, and reproaching him with his insensibility to the things of God ! In what energetic language he expressed his desire to consummate his sacrifice ! " I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized," said he, speaking of the bath of his own blood, in which he was to be immersed, " and how am I straitened until it be accomplished ! " (St. Luke xii. 50). At his last supper, on the eve of his Passion, he assured his apostles of his eagerness to partake of that last pasch with them

before his death. "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer" (*Ibid.* xxii. 15). When Judas had finally resolved on consummating his treachery Jesus, aware that all hope of the unhappy man's conversion had vanished, pressed him in a manner to expedite the completion of his crime. "That which thou dost, do quickly" (St. John xiii. 27). What did Jesus so much love in the cross? Was it suffering and humiliation for their own sake? No; considered in themselves they are neither amiable nor desirable. "No man," as St. Paul observes, "ever hated his own flesh" (Eph. v. 29), and Jesus Christ had less reason than any other mortal to desire the destruction of his. No one ever loved humiliation for itself, and to the incarnate God it should have been even more repugnant than to all other beings, honor and glory belonging to him by an incontestable right.  In his cross he loved the will of his Father; he loved the instrument of satisfaction to the Deity; he loved the opportunity of evincing his submission to the Divine decrees; he loved the weapon which was to conquer the power of Satan and lay prostrate the arrogant foe of God and man; he loved the means of rescuing us, his unhappy creatures, from the merited torments of hell, and restoring to us a claim on our forfeited inheritance of heaven. To comprehend the love

of Jesus for his cross, we should be capable of also comprehending the excess of his love for his Father and for men. That love was so intense that it may unhesitatingly be pronounced the greatest of his torments; all others he survived, but beneath that he sank, voluntarily breathing his last sigh in obedience only to the voice of his love.

If Jesus Christ loved his cross because he loved his Father, because he sought to promote the glory and accomplish the will of his Father, are we not obliged to love ours for the same reason? Is not God our Father, and has he not adopted us in the person of Jesus Christ? Should we not labor to promote his glory, and that the more earnestly as it is we who have outraged it? Should we not humbly submit to whatever trials he may please to send us? The conduct of Christ should be the rule of ours, for he has left us an example only that we may in all things conform to it. If Jesus loved his cross because he loved us, because he desired our spiritual welfare, because he had resolved to insure our eternal happiness at any cost to himself, have we not the same motives to urge us likewise to love the cross? Should we not love ourselves with a supernatural love? Should we desire anything so ardently as our everlasting bliss? Can we purchase such a treasure at too great a price?

Is the endurance of all the afflictions of the present life worthy to be put in competition with it? Are we not aware that our cross, united to that of our Redeemer, is the instrument, the pledge, the price of our salvation? and that it is impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven by any other road than the road of the cross? "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things," said Jesus of himself, "and so to enter into his glory?" (St. Luke xxiv. 26). And is it not equally necessary that we share those sufferings before we participate in that glory? Were the gates of heaven closed against the Saviour as against us? Had he sinned in Adam as we did? Had he been guilty of personal transgressions as we are? Were not honor and happiness the just inheritance of his sacred humanity in virtue of its union with the Word? Nevertheless, it was necessary that he should suffer; and shall it not be necessary for us, who to the original crime have added deliberate, actual guilt; who have forfeited all right to heaven, and are deserving only of hell? When we think differently we prove that our faith, if not altogether extinct, has at least lost all influence over our conduct.

St. Paul says, in allusion to his own afflictions: "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh" (Col. i. 24). Can there, then, be a deficiency in the fulness of

the ransom paid for us by our Divine Redeemer? No, assuredly; but that ransom, in itself ample and all-sufficient, cannot be applied to us unless we contribute something to the payment of the debt. The means of that payment God has provided in the crosses ordained for us by his Providence; and if we refuse to bear them the ransom of Christ will not avail us. "He who has created us without our aid will not save us without our co-operation" (St. Augustine). "If we suffer with him," says St. Paul, "we shall also be glorified with him" (Rom. viii. 17)—words explanatory of the sentence already quoted from the pages of the apostle.

Interior souls derive their love of the cross from deep meditation on the love of Christ for his, that meditation producing an irrepressible desire to adopt his sentiments and imitate his example. "My Saviour and Spouse was a 'man of sorrows,' and shall I refuse to taste the draught of sorrow? He was 'despised and the most abject of men,' 'a worm and no man' (Isa. liii. 3; Ps. xxi. 7), and shall I dread and detest humiliation! Ah, could I venture to approach him, to converse with him, to claim his tenderness, to expect that he should endure me in his presence, while cherishing such ideas and indulging such feelings!" This motive has incalculable influence on souls devoted to Jesus Christ,

because it is wholly based on love for their Redeemer. Nothing so powerfully arouses the strength and ardor of that love as the contemplation of his cross, and how can they love his cross without at the same time cherishing their own, which forms a part of his?

What is the cross we are required to bear in company with Jesus Christ? It is in the first place, for all Christians, the faithful observance of the Gospel maxims, a comprehensive subject when correctly understood, but in fact scarcely one in a thousand Christians perfectly fulfils those maxims in all their bearings. The cross next comprises the sufferings attached to the peculiar condition of each individual; the vicissitudes of life, the trials ordained by Providence, the casual annoyances, afflictions, and humiliations incident to our mortal pilgrimage. Scarcely can we move a step without encountering crosses of this description, which would prove both salutary and sweet if embraced and loved on supernatural principles. The cross farther includes the voluntary penance and austerity undertaken by ordinary Christians, with subordination to the rules of holy discretion, and imposed on themselves for life by the members of religious communities. It lastly embraces the interior sufferings inseparable from the spiritual life, and the particular trials reserved for some favored souls who are

destined to attain a peculiar conformity with Jesus Christ.

Incomparably more severe than all the exterior sufferings of Christ was the hidden anguish of his soul, resulting from many causes, which combined to envelop his mind in gloom and plunge his heart in bitterness. This, his mental agony, may be called the real because the permanent cross of our Redeemer. Trials such as this it is which impart to interior souls an especial resemblance, with their Divine Model, and it is a desire to attain that resemblance which prompts them to embrace, and supports them under the pressure of these trials.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OF THE HUMILITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

AMONG all the virtues of which Jesus Christ has left us a brilliant example there are two which he seems to have particularly recommended to our attention, and these two virtues, meekness and humility, having been the favorites of Christ, are for that reason the favorites also of interior souls. “Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls” (St. Matt. xi. 29). Let us first consider the degree of perfection to which our Divine

Model carried these virtues, and then inquire how far we should endeavor by his grace to imitate his example. We shall commence with humility, the foundation of meekness.

If any one could ever claim a lawful and even an absolute dispensation from the practice of humility, it would surely appear to have been Jesus Christ. He was God, and can humility appertain to a God? In his own nature most assuredly not. Even as man he was, proportionally speaking, equally exempt from it, for in virtue of the hypostatical union his sacred humanity was elevated to an unparalleled dignity—a dignity so exalted that the power of God himself could confer no higher on created nature. It was impeccable; it possessed the plenitude of grace; it had a secure title to a future throne in heaven at the right hand of the Eternal Father, and on earth it already enjoyed the beatific vision; in fine, all that it beheld in that nature, whether as connected with the powers of the body or the faculties of the soul, was rather calculated to exalt than to lower its estimation of itself. This is an indisputable fact, if it be understood of humility such as sinners like us may and should feel and practise. But the humility of Jesus Christ differed widely from that of man, both in its nature and extent. A consideration of the views and motives on which it

was based may give an idea of its depth. In the first place, Christ possessed a perfect comprehension of the infinite distance between the majesty of the self-existing God and the lowliness of the creature drawn from nothing, and as he united these two extremes in his own person he was at all times penetrated with the strongest possible conviction of God's greatness and his own abjection. In the second place, holy and spotless as was his soul, its purity and sanctity were the work of grace, not the gift of nature; what, then, must have been its impression of itself, by comparison with the infinite purity and sanctity of God? In the third place, as a necessary consequence of the hypostatical union, there existed in Jesus Christ but one person—that of the Word; therefore, his soul having no subsistence of its own, his condition was one of moral annihilation, which acted as an effectual preventive to his attributing to himself, or glorying in, any production of his sacred humanity. Further still, his soul being unable to produce any act by personal effort it was not free to humble itself, as ours are, but was maintained by the will of the Word in a permanent disposition of self-annihilation inconceivable to the human mind. If this can be called humility, it is at least humility of which only a Man-God is capable. In the fourth place, Jesus Christ being the destined victim of Divine

justice, he was at all times overwhelmed by the iniquities of the human race, as if they had been his own. His confusion was as great, his humiliation as profound, his belief in the legitimacy of his title to Divine anger as strong as if he had been the real criminal. Hence it follows that his humility not only equalled that which a degree of contrition proportioned to the enormity of their offences would produce in all creatures united, but that it infinitely surpassed even that prodigious amount of self-abjection, because he understood the grievousness of sin with a clearness of perception, and deplored its enormity with an intensity of feeling, unattainable by any mere creature, however exalted the degree of grace to which that creature had been elevated. The excess of the humility of Christ renders it one of the most incomprehensible of mysteries.

The habitual sentiments of profound awe, unbounded gratitude, and absolute devotion to God's glory resulting from his ineffable union with the Divinity, were also eminently calculated to produce extreme humility, a disposition yet further promoted by his voluntary dependence on his Father's will and his perpetual subjection to the dominion of grace.

I am overwhelmed, O my Saviour ! at the consideration of thy humility ; vainly does my bewildered mind endeavor to comprehend it ; all I

can clearly understand is, that it is an abyss whose depths no created intellect can fathom. But how canst thou require us to learn of thee that thou art humble of heart? What profit can we derive from a lesson so far above the reach of our comprehension? Dost thou intend to discourage us by thus placing before our eyes a model which, far from being able to imitate, we cannot even contemplate? Not so; the motives and impressions which produced the humility of Jesus Christ may and ought to lead to the same result in every Christian, according to the individual capacity of each.

God is the great All: we have nothing in the order either of nature or grace except what we derive from him. Let us never lose sight of this fundamental principle; let us recall it to mind as often as we are foolishly tempted to fancy ourselves anything great or good. Let us perpetually inquire of our hearts, "Of what can a nothing be proud? what good quality do I possess which I have not received, and, if I have received it, why do I glory in it as if it were my own?" Is not this one reflection sufficient to unveil the injustice of pride, to confound, to annihilate the odious vice for ever? All the good we attribute to ourselves we abstract from God, and surely no species of theft can be so criminal.

The moral virtues and sanctity we may chance

to possess are in their source a gratuitous effect of God's great mercy, and can assuredly bear no comparison with the holiness of Jesus Christ. If the soul of the Saviour, which was indebted for its surpassing gifts to its union with the Word, could not look on itself with complacency in presence of a God so pure and holy, how shall we dare to indulge vain-glory? What is the atom of sanctity we imagine discernible in ourselves? Shall a drop of water measure its depth with that of the boundless ocean? Shall a spark compare its brightness with the splendor of the sun? And how shall it be if even the shadow of purity we seem to possess is in reality but the reflection of the sanctity of God, not our own? Human nature as it exists in man, that is, tainted, vitiated, and consequently the source of all pride, had no existence in Jesus Christ; in us, on the contrary, it can never be extinct, our union with God being moral, not personal. But that moral union is susceptible of a perpetual increase, and in proportion as it becomes more intimate so is the self-love inherent in our nature gradually weakened, and at last so nearly extinguished that if we do not anticipate we at least arrest the first faint suggestions of pride, and attain to an habitual forgetfulness of self, which for man is the perfection of humility.

Jesus was only the representative of sinners;

we, on the contrary, are and have been guilty of personal transgressions. If he was so humble because he represented sinners, what should we be? The very capability of sinning, of revolting against our God, our Creator, and our Father, of consummating the basest treachery and blackest ingratitude, should suffice to inspire profound humility. This principle being established, how shall we fail to be humble when we behold the sad spectacle of innumerable sins of all kinds, repeated frequently and with deliberate malice? How shall we fail to be humble when we recognize in our hearts the germ of every crime; when we remember that our infidelity to grace has often exposed us to the commission of those crimes, and that we are still liable to fall unless God's great mercy uphold us? How shall we fail to be humble when we enumerate the many occasions on which we have deserved hell, and reflect that, had God listened only to the voice of his justice, our eternal lot would be amidst its devouring flames?

If it have pleased God to honor us with those special gifts reserved for a privileged few the more profound should be our humility. The greater our unworthiness, the deeper should be our confusion that the Lord of all perfection condescends to stoop to our misery. But, independently of extraordinary favors, all Christians have

received a grace equally calculated to excite unlimited gratitude, equally worthy to inspire unbounded devotion, with a degree of humility proportioned to those sentiments: the inestimable grace of the Divine adoption—a grace purely gratuitous, a grace of which all others are but a consequence, a grace infinitely precious, because an extension and a communication of the ineffable privilege reserved to the adorable humanity of Jesus Christ.

God's supreme dominion over our thoughts, words, and actions; his right to exercise that dominion without prejudice to our liberty; our absolute obligation to obey his will and co-operate with his grace, all concur to prove that humility is the natural appendage of humanity.

Our dependence on God being extreme and universal so should our humility likewise be; and our duty on this point will be complied with only in as far as we aspire to imitate the submission, the obedience, and the humility of our model, Jesus Christ. We can now understand the meaning of the divine lesson: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart." We are acquainted with the motives which imperatively urge the practical study of that heavenly lesson, and we have also seen the wide range of duty it embraces. We know that humility must reside in the heart, and, according to circum-

stances, manifest itself externally in a simple, natural, and unaffected manner. We also know—that we must be humble without imagining ourselves so, which would be a refinement of pride, and without leading others to think us so, which would be pure hypocrisy. Let us incessantly pray for light to comprehend the nature of this sublime virtue, begging of God an ardent admiration of its divine beauty, a lively perception of its heavenly sweetness, above all, a generous and efficacious resolution to embody its sacred lessons in our conduct. It is to be acquired, like all other virtues, by exercise; experience aided by very little reflection will show how great a repugnance man naturally has to its practise. Our whole nature rebels at the very idea of a slight or a humiliation; we most cautiously conceal whatever can lower us in the estimation of others; we seek to hide the unpalatable truth even from ourselves, and never are we willing to appear in our own eyes such as we really are. Let us at least begin by detesting our pride, by blushing at it, by beseeching God to heal the dreadful malady and to grant us courage to apply the necessary remedies. Let us frequently enter into the sacred Heart of Jesus to study its sentiments, and we shall discover only incentives to humility, only motives to facilitate the exercise of that essential virtue. The humility of our Redeemer's

Heart should be the principal object of our practical devotion, and our most frequent aspiration should be: "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, have mercy on me!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON THE MEEKNESS OF CHRIST.

MEELINESS is the daughter of humility; the two virtues are inseparably allied, and the increase of one is exactly proportioned to the progress of the other. How perfect, then, must have been the meekness of Christ, and how well was he entitled to say, "Learn of me, because I am meek!" With the practice of that amiable virtue he admirably combined the exercise of zeal and firmness, displaying a holy indignation, and even exerting his Divine authority, when it was necessary to defend the interests of heaven, to protect the privileges of truth, to correct abuses, or to reprove hypocrites who imposed on the credulity of the people by multiplied external forms of piety. But when only his personal prerogatives were at stake he never repelled insult or outrage; if he refuted calumny, it was with extreme moderation; not the slightest anger was perceptible in his words or deportment, and to the rage of his enemies he simply opposed the

calm, incontrovertible arguments of Divine wisdom. In the exercise of his marvellous meekness he had but to follow the natural impulse of his sacred Heart, wherein lay its source, and, as the movements of his soul were at all times regulated by the will of the Word, it was utterly impossible its equanimity should ever be even slightly disturbed. Yet it must be observed that as no being was ever endowed with feelings so acutely sensitive and so delicately refined, none was ever in consequence so keenly alive to the malice and injustice of men, for which he experienced all the abhorrence a God could feel.

His meekness was called into constant action by the contradictions encountered during his public life, and it shone with a brilliant lustre in the means he adopted to justify himself against many serious accusations, such as violating the Sabbath, of casting out devils through the agency of Beelzebub, the prince of devils, of associating familiarly with sinners, or again, of being a Samaritan, a man possessed by an evil spirit, and a blasphemer. The inveterate hatred of the Jews frequently inspired them with the resolution of forcibly seizing his person and casting him from a precipice or stoning him to death. Their fury was extreme, and his gentle forbearance, far from appeasing, served but to increase its violence,

We have already considered the conduct of Christ towards his apostles, who, no less than his enemies, furnished ample opportunity for the exercise of his Divine meekness. He lived among them rather as a friend and a father than a master, treating them almost as equals. When we remember who he was and consider his infinite superiority, not only as God, but even as man, his goodness and affability cannot fail to excite our wondering admiration. They were simple in heart and free from vice, yet subject to many faults and bad habits. For these he reformed them with wisdom and moderation when he judged a reprehension advantageous; but while their imperfections retained dominion he patiently bore with them, knowing their reformation would be complete only after the descent of the Holy Ghost. The holier he was himself the more must he have suffered from their frailties, yet in no instance did he, in consequence, address them harshly or reproachfully. In his efforts for their correction he never sought any other end than their own immediate advantage, ever laboring to gain their hearts by the sweet attractions of charity and to cement the union which bound them to him and to each other.

They were ignorant, slow of comprehension, and incapable of understanding heavenly things. How great the difficulty he must have experienced

in teaching them ! How low he must have stooped to attain the level of their uncultivated minds ! How frequently he must have repeated the same instruction ! And who but himself could have refrained from at least an interior emotion of impatience at seeing how little they understood or retained of those heavenly lessons, which were in a manner lost ? Teachers are the more liable to irritation and discouragement in proportion as their own intellect is brilliant and that of their pupils obscure. I know not if any saint be so entirely master of his feelings as to control them perfectly while imparting instruction to minds of a certain cast. Hence we may form an idea of the ineffable meekness of Christ, who, though possessing all the treasures of Divine knowledge, was never disheartened in his intercourse with those earthly-minded and illiterate beings, and neglected no opportunity of elevating their thoughts to the contemplation of spiritual things. He could easily have imparted to them more abundant light and grace ; he could have removed their prejudices and opened their understanding to penetrate the Scriptures ; he did so after his resurrection, but not sooner, for the hour had not come, and he awaited it with perfect submission to his Father's will, testifying no desire to anticipate its arrival.

Meekness is a virtue of daily practice, and its

necessity of constant recurrence in the intercourse of social and domestic life. No individual is exempt from faults ; it does not always depend on us to correct those of our neighbor ; perhaps we have no authority to do so, perhaps we have, but that our efforts to effect a reformation have hitherto proved fruitless. In such cases the only alternative is to support patiently what we cannot remedy. "Bear ye one another's burdens," said St. Paul, "and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2), a precept indispensably necessary to the maintenance of peace and union in private families, in secular and religious communities—in short, wherever men live in society. What meekness is requisite for the preservation of that peace and union ! By meekness I do not mean inert passiveness, sometimes inherent in the character, and resulting rather from apathy, indolence, and weakness of mind than virtue. Neither do I mean feigned moderation, which springs from politeness, policy, or prudence, and is merely external, the motives whence it arises having no tincture of divine charity, and, in numberless instances, either losing their influence or ceasing altogether to exist. The meekness now under consideration is wholly supernatural, both in itself and in its principle ; it is the fruit of humility, of charity, of the empire of grace over nature, of habitual union with God, and of

the undisturbed reign of heaven's peace over the faculties of the soul.

If much meekness is requisite in bearing the faults of our neighbor, still more is perhaps necessary in correcting them, because with meekness must then be combined firmness, zeal, and holy anger, inspired by grace. How pure must zeal be to be meek ! How prudent must firmness be to escape the extreme of inflexible harshness ! How intimately must the soul be united to God to exercise just indignation without losing her equanimity or secretly indulging her natural impetuosity ! Reprehension accompanied by the requisite qualities is the triumph of meekness. Nothing is more rare than to correct with that attention to time and manner which insures the success of the reprimand, and, instead of arousing resentment, leads to a recognition of the fault in question with a resolution of amendment. Meekness should form the peculiar study of all who are charged with the conduct of others ; who are obliged to give advice or to administer reproof. It is difficult to attain the medium between culpable apathy and excessive severity, and unless the soul be well advanced in the interior life she will not easily avoid one or other of these extremes. To dispose the mind to receive reprehension or counsel with profit, to acquire a gentle influence over the heart and understand-

ing, to make due allowances for human frailty, to exact no more than can be accomplished ; to gain the confidence of the erring and gradually prepare them for a spiritual cure, this is a divine art which only God can teach, and which he imparts but to those of whom his spirit has taken full possession.

Preachers and spiritual writers should study to clothe their instructions in the attractive garb of an insinuating style. How difficult to resist the heavenly influence of the works of a Thomas à Kempis, a St. Francis de Sales, a Fénelon ! Their pen, ever guided by the sweet spirit of meekness, depicts virtue in colors so engaging that it is impossible to refuse a practical assent to doctrine invested with such powerful attractions. These men of prayer were but the organs of grace, which, encountering in their docile hearts no opposition to its designs, spoke through them with that divine unction which so irresistibly captivates the will. Useful and solid works on the interior life may always be recognized by a prevailing spirit of moderation peculiar to themselves, and in this spirit alone should the sacred maxims of Christ ever be explained.

Meekness is especially necessary for those whose peculiar position obliges them to impart private instruction, either in the tribunal of

penance or in familiar conversation. They have to encounter weakness of intellect, perversity of heart and evil dispositions of many kinds. If they exhibit ill-humor, impatience, or haughtiness, if they assume an authoritative, imperious air they will create a prejudice both against themselves and their doctrine, and, after disgusting, will alienate their hearers. They should study the method adopted by grace in imparting its Divine lessons; the wisdom with which it adapts its instructions to each capacity; the imperceptible gradations by which it insinuates its light; the gentle force with which it gradually subdues the will, perpetually renewing its efforts, undeterred by a first repulse; ever watchful for the propitious moment, ever judicious in the selection of the favorable opportunity, ever persevering in its opposition to obstacles, ever wise in the choice of motives most calculated to win the heart, ever prudent in concealing or removing such difficulties as to mortal weakness might seem insuperable. Such were the instructions of Jesus Christ, the author of grace; such should also be the lessons of those to whom he has confided the ministry of his Word, or whom, on particular occasions, he especially inspires to assist their neighbor by their counsels.

It must not be supposed that meekness ex-

cludes zeal ; the two virtues are, on the contrary, quite consistent, one moderating the ardor and regulating the impetuosity of the other. Whenever the occasion demanded it Jesus Christ displayed lively zeal without prejudice to his meekness. St. Paul, his faithful imitator, combines in his epistles the energy of holy anger with the tenderness of charity. St. John, who is meekness itself, openly vents his indignation against the enemies of Christ and the violators of the precept of fraternal love. Yield unreservedly to the influence of the spirit of God ; let him speak by your lips and guide the movements of your heart. Above all, be careful that nature have no share in a work which should be purely supernatural, for, whether its influence extend to interior disposition or merely to external manner, it will mar the success of the holy enterprise, and, after much labor, nothing will remain but regret for having so ill co-operated with grace.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST FOR HIS FATHER.

OF all mankind Jesus Christ alone perfectly fulfilled the great precept of the law : “ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole

heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength" (St. Mark xii. 30); his love exceeding the united love, past and present, of all creatures in heaven and on earth. As it is impossible to conceive a more intimate union between the two natures of God and man than the hypostatical union, so would it be equally impossible to correspond with such a favor by greater love than that of Jesus Christ. In one sense his love was, it is true, independent of him, his soul uninterruptedly enjoying the Divine vision, without even the possibility of losing it. But the possession of that exalted privilege never interfered with the perfect freedom of his will, the unshackled impulse of which ever tended to the voluntary exercise of perfect love; and under this aspect it is that he is proposed in our present obscure life of faith as our model of Divine love, as of all other virtues. His love being meritorious, both for him and for us, it must necessarily have been entirely free and every manifestation of it accompanied by his own express consent. It follows that we can and ought to imitate the charity of Jesus Christ by loving God according to the full extent of the grace communicated to us for that end.

The qualities of the love of Christ for his Father next claim our attentive consideration.

He loved him with his *whole mind*—that is, his love was proportioned to the knowledge he possessed of God's infinite amiability and of his supreme right to the homage of all creatures. The will being in itself a blind faculty it must be wholly guided in the exercise of its affections by the light of reason ; it has attained the limit of its own capacity when the intensity of its love corresponds with the strength of the motives to love proposed by the understanding. The extent to which Christ carried his knowledge of God's infinite amiability is not now the subject in debate. When we assert that it passes our comprehension all is said ; when we admit that his love was exactly proportioned to that knowledge enough is known for our practical utility, since this should likewise be our rule in loving God with our whole mind. Our knowledge of God and of his benefits is incomparably inferior to that of Jesus Christ, but, such as it is, does our love correspond with it? Self-examination on this point cannot be too minute. Its results should be confusion at past infidelities, with a sincere determination to fulfil our duty to God more perfectly in future. We know that God, being sovereignly perfect, is supremely amiable in himself. What are we to conclude thence? That we shall never love him sufficiently ; that we should ever desire, ever endeavor, ever pray

to love him more, and never rest satisfied with the measure of our love. We know that God is the sole essentially amiable Good, and that the great motive of our love for him should be derived from himself, not from any consideration connected with personal interest, nor even from the gratitude we owe him. Is our love for God chiefly based on this exalted and disinterested principle? Alas! how many Christians, wise in their own conceit, but in truth fatally blinded by self-love, maintain that pure charity is the chimerical invention of a heated imagination; that it is adapted only to the blessed in heaven, and totally inappropriate to man during his sojourn on earth. Yet it was thus Christ loved; it is thus he invites, urges, and obliges us also to love; and certain it is that we shall never enter heaven unless one spark at least of pure love inflame our hearts. We should, then, aim at the purity of Divine love, and, without excluding other motives, make of this the ruling principle of our affections. We know that we are indebted to God for our being, and with it for all natural gifts; we are also aware that, as regards the order of grace, no gratitude of ours can equal the benefits already bestowed and those in reserve for the next life. It is certain that we are in no way necessary to the felicity of our Maker, and that in creating us for eternal happiness he

was actuated only by gratuitous goodness. Our whole existence is one unbroken tissue of personal favors ; therefore reason and faith concur in declaring the justice of “loving God, who first hath loved us” (St. John iv. 19), and of loving him, too, with a degree of ardor proportionate to the immensity of his mercies. Do we love him thus? Do we render the light of reason and revelation subservient to his love? Our obligation to do so is so much the more imperative as he asks no other return for his innumerable benefits, both in the order of nature and grace.

Jesus Christ loved his Father with his *whole mind*—that is, from the first moment to the last sigh of his mortal life all his thoughts, views, and projects were consecrated to the glory of his Father ; his whole being was referred to that one end, and no other object engaged his attention. Does God thus occupy the whole capacity of our mind? If so, whence proceed so many sinful and so many useless thoughts? Whence originate views so earthly, plans bearing so little connection with God’s glory, projects tending rather to outrage than to honor our Creator? Must we not own with confusion that the remembrance of God, which should be our most familiar thought, is perhaps that we cherish least, that we find most wearying, that we seek to banish, that for which we willingly substitute

the first object that dissipates the senses or amuses the imagination? Must we not confess that, from the natural tendency of our views to self, we are engrossed, even at prayer, far more by foreign matters than by God's presence? One of the properties of love being that all places and circumstances recall the object beloved, have we not reason to doubt the existence of our love for God, or at least to admit the weakness of the feeling?

Jesus Christ loved God with his *whole mind*—that is, he perpetually submitted his will, on a principle of love, to the will of his Father; he had no other rule of judgment than the decrees of his Father; he admitted no thoughts but those inspired by his Father. It is not loving God with our whole mind to follow the suggestions of our own judgment, to retain the dominion of our thoughts and to refuse submission to the Spirit of God. The spirit of man being of its own nature opposed to the Spirit of God, it is evident that, in adhering to its decisions, yielding to its dictates, and adopting its views, we act in direct opposition to the precept of charity. Have we ever understood that the fulfilment of that precept requires the absolute renunciation of our own spirit? and, now that we are convinced of the necessity of immolating it, are we fully resolved to do so? To succeed in the determina-

tion we should begin by trying to understand what is meant by the spirit of man, how far our own has dominion over us, how subtle are its wiles, and how perilous is its power. To attain this important end we should consult God in prayer and seek instruction in approved spiritual works. When we have acquired the knowledge in which we are now deficient we shall be more disposed to sacrifice our spirit to the glory of our Maker, to aim untiringly at its immolation, and to pray that the Spirit of God may descend on us from heaven as a substitute for our own.

Jesus Christ loved his Father with his *whole heart*. The first act of his life was to consecrate his heart to God, entirely, absolutely, and irrevocably. The gift was not vague or general, or bestowed without a determinate object. He fully comprehended the obligations entailed by the act, and, with a clear perception of the rigor of God's designs and a distinct knowledge of the extent of the sacrifice required, he offered himself, in the spirit of strong and generous love, to be its voluntary Victim. His devotion to his Father's will would have extended yet further had additional proofs of obedience been demanded, for the intensity of his love far surpassed the severity of the trials which awaited him. From that moment his adorable Heart was

consumed by the flames of love—but of love how ardent! how glowing! All the love of the angels and saints in heaven, all the love of the just on earth from the dawning of time to its close, bears no comparison with that which inflamed the Heart of Jesus. All the love of God which men have ever felt or will feel is but a spark from the burning furnace of the love of Jesus!

At baptism the habit of charity is infused into our souls, and the obligation contracted to consecrate our hearts to him as soon as the light of reason has revealed his existence and perfections. How few fulfil the duty as soon as they should! How few, again, ratify the donation as they advance in years! How many, on the contrary, revoke it when the insidious voice of temptation breathes its first whisperings! The happiness of an early consecration to God is the privilege of a very few among the saints, the greater number having delayed the full devotion of their hearts to heaven until they had first forfeited sanctifying grace altogether, or at least wavered long between God and creatures. The bulk of men live and die without having ever perfectly renewed the first donation of their hearts to their Creator. Among the multitudes who rank as pious it is too true that only interior souls truly devote their hearts to God; and, even among

these, there is a difference in the perfection of the gift, according to the measure of grace and the amount of fidelity of each. Who can believe that the heart which God so earnestly solicits, which so justly belongs to him, which even interest so forcibly urges us to bestow, is the gift we feel the strongest reluctance to surrender and refuse with such determined perseverance that, unless God with merciful violence asserted his claim, he never would obtain dominion over it? How deep must be the degradation entailed by sin and self-love when we find it a matter of so much difficulty to love God with our whole heart! What a subject of shame and confusion!

Jesus Christ loved his Father with his *whole heart*; his affections were wholly devoted to him, and that with all the vehemence of which he was capable. He loved nothing but with reference to his Father and with the same love as that he bore his Father. Never was there the least rapine in the holocaust. His heart tended directly to God with an inconceivable activity and rapidity, never checked by even a momentary deviation from the pursuit of that one object; more correctly speaking, it was at all times engulfed and lost in God. Whom did he love in his holy Mother, in St. Joseph, in the apostles, in all men? God, and God alone. His affec-

tions neither would nor could cling around any other object. Where are the saints whose affections are all devoted to God, who have no human attachment however insignificant, or who, when they perceive one, eradicate it with a strong hand? How difficult it is to love only God in all he commands or permits us to love ! How rare is such pure, devoted charity ! If our hearts were wholly under subjection to Divine love we should imagine that its feelings must in consequence be restrained and shackled, never reflecting that, on the contrary, in that love consists its true liberty ; while, on the contrary, the smallest affection which divides is a fetter which weighs it down and impedes its flight towards the sovereign Good.

Jesus Christ loved his Father with his *whole heart*, never seeking his own interest, never glorying in his own perfections, never loving any object with reference to his personal advantage. His interests and his very existence being identified with the person of the Word, self-love could have no being in him. He loved his soul and body, no doubt ; but he loved them as united with the Word and appertaining to the Word ; his love for them was identical with his love for his Father. We are not required to attain such ineffable purity of love ; yet we should aim at the highest degree of Divine charity of which God's

grace shall render us capable ; and, for this end, we should resolutely oppose self-love, the irreconcilable enemy of the love of God, endeavoring daily to weaken its influence and pursuing it unsparingly into the innermost recesses of the heart. The love of God increases in proportion as the love of self diminishes. To view self-love in its true colors and detest it as it deserves we stand in need of supernatural light and grace, gradually imparted by the Almighty to those alone who are determined to love him with their whole heart.

Jesus Christ loved his Father with his *whole strength*, using his corporal faculties only as instruments to co-operate with the soul in testifying her love for God. He employed his strength in laboring and suffering for his Father's honor ; he allowed nature merely the amount of nourishment and rest necessary to dispose it for more labor and suffering ; in fine, he yielded his sacred flesh a prey to the most cruel torments, and immolated it as a holocaust on the altar of the cross, after having poured out the last drop of its life-blood.

Do we ever remember that the flesh we so tenderly pamper should be the victim of Divine love ? that the indulgence we allow it no sooner transgresses the bounds of necessity than it becomes an open infringement on the lawful do-

minion of that love? that the ingenuity with which we guard it against the approach of pain, fatigue, inconvenience, and mortification is a breach of the precept of charity; that breach considerably aggravated when we minister to its love of sensual gratification and its propensity for effeminate indolence? when we limit our solicitude to its comforts and worship it as our soul's idols, devoting our energies to its service, instead of sacrificing it to the service of God. How great the disparity between the example of Christ and our conduct in this particular! His body was the first object he sacrificed to his Father's glory; he had assumed it for no other end than to immolate it at a future day, and it was with a perpetual view to that final destiny that he supported its strength and life, ever considering and treating it as a doomed victim. Yet his flesh was holy, innocent, and inseparably united to the Divinity, whereas ours is vitiated in its origin, rebellious against the Spirit, and the principal source of our sins—the gratification of its groveling propensities being the chief end of the passions.

Jesus Christ loved his Father with all the faculties of his soul: his memory, will, understanding, and even imagination, were replenished with God alone, directed to God alone, occupied on God alone. The powers of his soul

derived their action from the will of the Word, and the action of the soul in turn directed the movements of the body, so that his being was wholly and absolutely subject to the dominion of love. Is this our case? Do we aspire, even in desire, to such perfection of love? Do we earnestly endeavor to attain it? What is it that engages the energies of our ever-restless spirit? Is the object of its thoughts, recollections, and affections God or the things of God? Is God the term of its activity and its life? Does a supernatural principle guide its movements and regulate its operations, directing all to the love of God? So should it be with the Christian: at least to this he is obliged to attend with untiring earnestness if he means to love God with all his strength. You will object that such a practice is impossible here below; but on what grounds do you found the assertion? You use such language only because you have not yet made the trial. Begin, and soon you will discover how rapidly love extends its influence when once it has acquired the dominion of the heart; appropriating the use of man's spiritual and corporal faculties, consecrating to itself his labors and sufferings, pleasures and pains, summoning the powers of his being around it, as round a common centre, and reducing to its own singleness the multiplicity of views which distract the

mind and divide the heart. Love commences its operations by concentrating the soul within herself; from the interior it communicates its influence to the exterior, and ends by assuming absolute dominion over its happy victim. It is a fire which extends with irresistible force, no object within reach escaping its impetuosity; and when it has consumed all that is opposed to its own nature it transforms into itself whatever it reaches.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST FOR
MANKIND.

THE love of our neighbor is a necessary consequence of the love of God; for we cannot truly love God without at the same time loving what he loved and what he commands us to love. God loves man, who is the work of his hands, and whom he has created with no other view than his happiness; and he requires all men, particularly Christians, to love one another. We may easily infer the extent of Christ's love for men by considering the nature of his love for God, for one is proportioned to the other, and both were carried to the utmost attainable limits. In fact, the love of Jesus Christ for his Father and for man is but one love, both being the

same in principle and differing only in their object.

We are well acquainted with the evidences Jesus has given of his love for us ; faith proposes them to our consideration ; they are amply developed in innumerable pious works, and have been familiar to us from childhood ; but our misfortune is that we neglect to feed our hearts on those heavenly truths by deep and constant meditation.

The love of Jesus Christ embraced every individual of the human race, each occupying a distinct place in his Divine Heart, and as that Heart was infinite in capacity, it contained ample room for all, its tenderness for one never encroaching on its affection for another. Every Christian may appropriate the Heart of Jesus Christ as if its love had been centred in him alone, and say with St. Paul, "He loved *me* and delivered himself for *me*" (Gal. ii. 20). Thus each mortal participates as abundantly in the benign influence of the sun as if his invigorating rays were shed on one alone.

Jesus Christ loved us when, as sinners, we were undeserving of his mercy. Born children of wrath, we were by that very fact destitute of all claim to the love either of Christ or his Father, and had he refused to reverse the decree which condemned us to eternal misery,

thereby irrevocably confirming the fatal sentence which excluded us from his love, still should we have had no right to arraign his justice. The dread array of our personal crimes, present in anticipation to his all-seeing mind, offered another forcible argument in proof of our unworthiness of his love, and yet its utmost tenderness was prodigally lavished on us.

He loved us, although he foresaw that in defiance of his goodness we should persevere in offending him, trampling on his merits, and abusing the graces purchased by his blood. Where shall we find a benefactor ever disposed to renew favors to which ingratitude has been the past return? ever ready to repeat the generous kindness which has hitherto been rendered instrumental to direct insults against himself?

He loved us not with reference to this transient life, which vanishes as a fleeting dream, but to the future life, which endures for ever. He loved us not with a view to our release from the transitory trials of time, but from the endless woes of eternity; not to insure us perishable happiness, but infinite and immortal bliss. He alone could avert the one and bestow the other, and had he not extended to us his merciful aid our destruction must have been inevitable. His love sprang purely from the natural impulse of his own tender heart; he had nothing to fear from with-

holding nor to hope from bestowing it; it was preventing and unsolicited, gratuitous and generous, tender, amiable, and active. Nothing that he could do did he leave undone, going even to such lengths as to identify himself with us, his wretched creatures, and satisfy God's justice in our name. He bore the weight of our iniquities and suffered the punishment due to them. He shed his blood to open heaven's gates, and left us the treasure of his merits as our only passport to the regions of bliss. He became an object of malediction in the eyes of God to reconcile us to the offended Deity. He submitted to all the rigor which would have been his due had he been sin itself to induce his heavenly Father to adopt us as his children and restore us the heavenly inheritance we had lost.

As our Physician, he not only healed our maladies but endeavored to anticipate the necessity of a cure. Pride and self-love are the two sources of our spiritual miseries; for both he provided a remedy in his own humility and mortification. He embraced a poor, obscure, and contemptible condition to inspire us with detachment from the wealth, the pomp, and the empty honors of the earth; he drained the cup of sorrow and humiliation to deprive the draught of future bitterness, and in the sacraments he opened to us fountains of grace, whence he in-

vites us to draw the priceless treasure according to our necessities.

As our Divine Master he taught us the truths he had learned in the bosom of his Father; he discovered to us the secrets of heaven, and opened our minds by faith to comprehend them. He left us in the Gospel a pure and sublime code of morality, the practice of which must infallibly lead both to present and future happiness. Before he came on earth men were equally ignorant of the nature of true happiness and of the path that leads to it, and numberless were the theories laid down by philosophers of old for the solution of this interesting question. By one word Jesus Christ removed the difficulty, telling us that he is *the way* which guides to peace; *the truth* which reveals it; *the life* which both contains and imparts it.

As our High-Priest he once immolated himself on the cross, and daily renews the sacrifice on the altar, to honor the sovereign majesty of God, in his own name and ours; to offer an adequate thanksgiving for the Divine benefits as well as a sufficient atonement for sin, and to obtain for man all necessary graces. No victim but Jesus Christ is capable of giving glory to God, of discharging the debt of gratitude due by earth to heaven, of remitting the least sin, or meriting the least grace. Although seated at the right

hand of the Father in the kingdom of glory, he continues still to exercise on our behalf the functions of our eternal High-Priest, our sovereign Mediator and most merciful Advocate.

As our Shepherd he leads his flock into rich and verdant pastures, where he feeds them with his own sacred flesh, satiates their thirst with his own precious blood, vigilantly guards against the approach of evil spirits, represented by devouring wolves, pursues the strayed sheep with indefatigable ardor, and, having traced its fugitive steps, brings it back to the fold on his shoulders with joy and triumph.

The manifestations of Christ's love form an inexhaustible theme; no less do its ardor and tenderness baffle description. What is the natural conclusion to be drawn thence? That the God who thus loved us is well entitled to command that we love one another, well entitled to propose his love as the model of ours. He requires nothing which he has not first practised in perfection; "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another as I have loved you" (St. John xiii. 34). What could be more new than the precept of a love until then unexampled? The whole world marvelled at the charity which reigned among the primitive Christians, and by that mark recognized the disciples of Him who died the victim of his love for

men. Alas ! vainly do we seek for faithful observers of the Saviour's great precept among Christians of the present day ! By the generality that precept is scarcely understood ; by the few who do understand its nature it is considered merely as a supererogatory point of exalted perfection. The reason is, that to imitate the love of Jesus Christ, viewing such imitation as a matter of strict obligation, it is necessary to live by the spirit of Christ and to have advanced considerably into the sanctuary of his holy Heart. It is, however, certain that the Christian belongs to Jesus Christ only in so far as he copies the charity of his Model, and that the loving Saviour rejects those hearts which are callous, cold, and indifferent towards their neighbor, because wholly centred in self.

Natural kindness of heart is an amiable disposition, presupposing many other good qualities, but it is not a virtue based on a supernatural principle and animated by the exalted motives which religion supplies. It does not constitute charity merely to refrain from doing to our neighbor what we should not wish our neighbor to do to us (Job iv. 16) ; this is a lesson inculcated by the law of nature, and one, too, which, but for the fatal infatuation of self-love, we should blush to neglect as we do. Neither is it sufficient to exercise in our fellow-creatures' re-

gard the benevolence we desire to experience from them in return (St. Matt. vii. 12). Charity of this description, if it be limited to external manifestations of that civility and kindness which constitute the pleasure of social intercourse, and are so often called into action by the real wants or fictitious sensibilities of those around us, may be the result of natural goodness of heart, or of the refining influence of education, or it may be the effect merely of self-love and covert self-seeking. How few Christians make it their rule to treat others as they themselves would wish to be treated? How few put themselves in their neighbor's place and their neighbor in their own, and say: "If I were in such or such a situation, how should I like to be dealt with? how should I like to be spoken to? So should I act and speak to my neighbor, and, if I depart from this rule, I fail in my duty both to God and myself." This principle of conduct embraces an infinite detail; our daily faults proceed from the neglect of it—that neglect the result either of thoughtlessness or deliberation, or of unwillingness to sacrifice our convenience, even in trifles, for the benefit or gratification of others.

The truly charitable Christian considers his neighbor with the eyes of faith, he looks on him as his brother in Jesus Christ, as a child of the same heavenly Father, as an heir to the same

paradise; as a being destined to live eternally with him in the holy city of God, whence selfishness is totally excluded, where all drink at the same fountain of bliss, and enjoy their felicity the more that it is equally shared by all. He believes that he should as far as possible cherish the same feelings for his brethren here below which shall hereafter actuate him in heaven; that he should desire and, to the utmost extent of his ability, contribute to their temporal and spiritual welfare, sacrificing to them, if necessary, his exertions, his repose, his wealth, his reputation, his very life, according to the example of Christ, too happy that by such sacrifices he can attain any degree of conformity with his adorable Model. Christ requires of us incomparably less than he has himself performed, and still we find that he asks too much; nothing costs us more than the observance of the law of love, nor is there any ordinance from which we dispense ourselves with greater facility or less remorse. The apostle complained that "all seek the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. ii. 21). The interests of Christ are neglected when those of our neighbor are overlooked. All the good or ill we do to others, either in a spiritual or temporal point of view, he considers as done to himself, and he expressly declares that by this rule will rewards

and punishments be regulated at the last day. Alas ! this all-important truth does not engage our attention as it should ! In every page of the Gospel we find motives of charity, examples of charity, lessons of charity ; the whole Christian code is reduced to the precept of charity. " He that loveth his neighbor," says St. Paul, " hath fulfilled the law : for love is the fulfilling of the law " (Rom. xiii. 8, 10). And yet, far from devoting our energies to the exercise of charity, we do not even study its obligations or endeavor to sound its depth. That depth is fathomless ; the Christian's charity may and should be exercised towards all men and under all circumstances, either by desire, by prayer, or by deed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LOVE WAS AT ONCE THE SOURCE OF CHRIST'S
HAPPINESS AND HIS ANGUISH.

THE truth I now propose to develop is experimentally known but to interior souls, and even to these it is disclosed only when they have made some progress in the spiritual life, for it is one of those truths which the heart must feel before the understanding can comprehend it. Christians in general assent to it as a point of faith, but they do not understand, because they

have never experienced it, nor ever aimed at those dispositions which would render them worthy to do so.

We know, on the testimony of faith, that Jesus Christ was the happiest and, at the same time, the most suffering of men ; this apparent contradiction was in him perfectly reconcilable. In his case happiness did not detract from suffering, nor did suffering encroach on happiness. He was supremely blessed, enjoying in his sacred humanity all the bliss which the Word could communicate to him, and so intimately and inseparably united to the sovereign Good, both in soul and body, that it was impossible he could even desire a greater amount of felicity. He was at the same time a prey to unparalleled anguish, perpetually enduring interior pangs far transcending the united sufferings of all the saints, and so acutely sensitive was he to his corporal pains that for him they were invested with infinitely more than the poignancy of all the martyrs' torments. The sorrows of his heart shed their uninterrupted influence over the whole course of his mortal life, and never for one moment was he released from the overwhelming burden of his ever-enduring anguish. We cannot form a conception of the physical impression produced by that interior sadness ; the languor, the exhaustion, the total prostration which

followed it, particularly at prayer; its violence may be in some degree estimated by the consideration of the agony which overpowered his soul in the Garden of Olives. It must ever be borne in mind that his interior and exterior sufferings were immeasurably aggravated by the horrors of the deep desolation which became his portion as the representative of sinners.

When we separately consider the happiness and the anguish of Jesus Christ we find it easy to admit that each must have been extreme: the difficulty is to understand how two sensations so opposed could be combined in one person; that difficulty is, however, removed by a simple reference to the guiding principle of the life of Christ, his ardent, exhaustless charity, which effectually reconciled the contending feelings. He had accepted his sufferings freely, impelled thereto by his generous love alone; he would not voluntarily have exempted himself from them; he preferred them to pure enjoyment, suspending by an enduring miracle the effects of the hypostatical union, which imparted infinite happiness to his soul. Love for his Father was the source of his greatest torment, for he saw that Father whom he so tenderly cherished daily outraged by the sins of men, notwithstanding the pledge of incomprehensible mercy he had given to the world in the person of his only Son, and that love,

while it caused his most bitter grief, constituted at the same time his greatest bliss. Another pang, scarcely inferior in intensity, resulted from his love for men, the greater proportion of whom, far from profiting by his sacrifice, would, he knew, pervert it, to their more dreadful condemnation. But for the loss of these he was indemnified by the salvation of others, to whom his death would open heaven, and for the salvation of even one soul he would willingly have endured all his torments. Acquiescing, from sublime views, in the reprobation of those who should abuse his mercy, his peace underwent no diminution in consequence. Thus his soul was divided between two sensations, one sweet and blissful, the other bitter and crucifying; both were based on love, and so perfectly counterbalanced one another that each equally tended to his happiness, and never did he desire that the predominating influence of the first should weaken the agonizing impression of the second.

Similar to these are the effects produced by Divine love on interior souls, not, indeed, in the commencement of the spiritual life, when, generally speaking, consolation prepares the way for the cross; nor, again, as long as unsubdued nature rebels against suffering, violently struggling to disengage itself from the intolerable yoke, and looking on the hand of God which has imposed

it as the hand of a pitiless tyrant. The will does not participate, it is true, in this rebellion of natural feeling ; yet it can scarcely be said that in such a state the soul is at once in anguish and at peace. When can this be truly asserted? When vanquished nature opposes little or no resistance to the cross ; when it suffers without a struggle, without a murmur, without any interruption to the reign of interior peace ; when Divine love has so perfectly gained the ascendancy that the will fully acquiesces in all the ordinances of God ; when the soul is so satisfied to suffer that she would not diminish the severity or curtail the duration of her pains, but would consent to support them for a whole eternity if such were God's pleasure. Under these circumstances it is literally true that happiness and anguish exercise an equal dominion over her and that Divine love is the source of the contending sensations : she suffers because she loves, and in proportion as she loves and considers herself so privileged in being allowed to suffer that for no earthly consideration would she exchange her lot. Generous souls who had attained this enviable condition have been known to refuse the proffered joys of heaven and to beg for additional crosses, as the only favor they ambitioned ; the cross having become so completely the centre of their happiness that they could not

exist without it. Whence proceeded this disposition? From the love which discovered to them the will of God in the cross, and thus invested it with attractions preferable to the allurements of the world beside. To ordinary Christians who have no idea of the power of Divine love these feelings appear chimerical; yet they are so substantially real that, when the Almighty has once subjected his devoted servants to the ordeal of interior trial, he desists not, provided they faithfully co-operate with his views, until such sentiments have become theirs. Then alone does the trial terminate; as long as the soul desires its cessation so long does it last, and even redouble. She must consent to endure it as long as it shall please God; this consent is not forcibly extorted, not wrung from her by despair, but gradually won by love, and given at last fully and freely. She almost loses the capability of refusing it, so irresistible is the ascendancy gradually acquired over her by Divine love.

CHAPTER XL.

SIMPLICITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

AS simplicity is the distinctive character of the Divine perfections, which are infinite only because they are simple, so is it also the peculiar

characteristic of the virtues of Jesus Christ, which, by reason of their extreme simplicity, are beyond all measure sublime. How difficult to explain that supereminent quality which words cannot describe, which thought can scarcely penetrate ! To treat of it adequately, to understand it fully, requires the very peculiar assistance of the Spirit of God, which I now humbly implore for myself and my readers.

Virtues are simple when they are animated by one single motive ; when they are directed by one single intention, and tend to one single object. Such were the virtues of Jesus Christ. Their sole motive was the love of God ; their sole intention the glory of God ; their sole end the fulfilment of the will of God, and this motive, intention, and end are absolutely but one and the same. That motive was susceptible of no increased purity ; that intention of no further uprightness ; that end of no additional refinement from the alloy of any other less perfect object. Our advantage, sanctification, and happiness were also an intention, a motive, and an end proposed to himself by Jesus Christ. But his love for us was only a consequence of his love for God ; our perfection was referable to the glory of God, our happiness identified with the will of God, and thus all his views were reducible to perfect singleness and unity.

Virtue is simple when its exercise is neither accompanied nor followed by studied reflection, by reference to self, by solicitude regarding personal interest. Of this description were the virtues of Jesus Christ; he exercised them according to circumstances, by the pure impulse of grace, without premeditation, without effort, without any other rule than the guidance of the Spirit of God, and without subsequent investigation of the act of virtue performed. He spoke, he acted, he prayed, impelled only by the Divine action whose influence directed his soul, and he obeyed that action with perfect simplicity, never adding to it a personal effort, not even a glance at the act produced. The operations of his sacred humanity he referred directly to his Father's honor, never looking to himself or his interests; never seeking to derive personal glory either from God or man.

Simplicity characterized not only the virtues of Jesus Christ but also his exterior conduct, his words, and whole deportment. He affected nothing peculiar or remarkable; he assumed no extraordinary gravity of manner, austerity of life, or singularity of habit; he neither sought to attract observation nor to impress the multitude with an exalted opinion of his personal qualifications. So far was he from externally manifesting the hidden glories of the Divinity which dwelt within

him that, in order to recognize in him not even the Incarnate God but merely a human being, endowed with uncommon privileges, it was necessary to raise the veil of faith and penetrate beyond the surface apparent to the senses.

We can now understand the meaning of that spiritual infancy which he so highly eulogized, and of which he presented so striking a model for our contemplation. We can understand why he so tenderly loved children ; why he embraced and blessed them ; why he said, " Unless you become as little children you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven " ; and, " Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven " (St. Matt. xviii. 3, 4). And again: " Suffer little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God " (St. Luke xviii. 16). Childhood is the symbol of simplicity ; a child is incapable of deception or double dealing ; its feelings are faithfully reflected on its ingenuous countenance ; it does not pursue any methodical course of reasoning, but merely obeys the impulse of its heart. It has no rule of conduct beyond the untutored instinct imparted to it by the Almighty, and by following the direction of that faithful guide it attains its end without a deviation from the straight, sure path of rectitude. It is credulous because it has not learned the

lesson of distrust, it is docile because ignorant, dependent on the judgment and will of others because conscious of its own weakness.

When Jesus Christ tells us that such is the image of spiritual infancy, and that we must become children once more before God can reign in us without opposition, we cannot understand the mystery unless grace render it intelligible; we are inclined to ask with Nicodemus: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born again?" (St. John iii. 4). Yes, in a spiritual sense he can; and never will he understand the sublimity of the precepts and practice of Jesus Christ, never will he penetrate the depths of the Gospel morality, never will he love and relish its heavenly sweetness, except through the medium of holy simplicity and spiritual infancy. From the earliest stage of the interior life God calls his servants to the practise of this virtue; the first operations of his grace are directed to simplify the soul; those that follow tend to inflame her with the fire of charity, to vivify her whole conduct by the ennobling principle of love, and gradually to banish from her actions the influence of servile fear and interested motives. Her will is endowed with an uprightness, an ingenuous candor, and a confiding frankness totally opposed to malice, artifice, and

dissimulation. Her mind is divested of a multiplicity of views which serve but to divide the attention, and these are replaced by one single intention, eminently embracing all others—the pure intention of God's glory. The Almighty proposes to her but one object—the fulfilment of his adorable will, insensibly habituating her to render all things subordinate to that end. For the complicated exercise of the three spiritual powers, on a variety of subjects, he substitutes a simple description of prayer, which penetrates the understanding with an indistinct perception of God's perfections, viewed collectively, not separately, and at the same time fills the heart with a calm enjoyment of his presence, whence the soul insensibly imbibes the nourishment she requires. So subtle and delicate are her operations at that time that she is nearly unconscious of them, and supposes her state to be one of complete inaction. As she advances she is prohibited all reflections on her condition, not permitted to devote so much as a thought to it. Finally, she is disengaged by her heavenly Master from a variety of practices which she formerly cherished as the fuel of her piety, but which now could only fetter her faculties and retard her progress. These are the means God uses to form the soul to simplicity and mould her into the privileged condition of holy infancy. That

to be adopted on her part is great fidelity in restricting her operations within the limits God has assigned her; in checking the natural activity of the mind; in arresting arguments, speculations, curious investigations, and disquieting thoughts; in resisting deliberate reflection on any subjects but those suggested by the spirit of God; in seeking in spiritual books food for the heart rather than light for the understanding; in guarding against those terrestrial affections which serve as an impediment to interior liberty; in confining her attention to the perfect discharge of her daily duties, unobservant of the concerns of others, and cautious to avoid excessive ardor in the pursuit of her own. She should calmly watch over the movements of her heart, its desires and fears, its joys and regrets, and carefully repress them when discovered. She should not give admittance to exterior objects or attach herself from human views to any creature. She should be on her guard against self-love, which, whether it be gratified or wounded, equally makes use of the opposite emotions as instruments to arouse the passions; self-love, her subtle enemy, which seeks itself most particularly in spiritual things; which feeds on the incense it offers at its own shrine; which views itself now with complacent admiration and now with bitter mortification; which presumes

excessively on its strength at one time and sinks under proportionate despondency at another. Every operation of the mind, every movement of the heart, which does not spring from grace is opposed to simplicity; whatever centres the soul in herself, instead of establishing her in God, is duplicity; all exterior pursuits which are not ordained by the Divine will involve the soul in the turmoil attendant on multiplicity. Even practices of piety are an obstacle to simplicity if they are pursued with too much eagerness or tenacity. We should frequently meditate on the words of our Redeemer to Martha, who so actively displayed her zeal and love in ministering to his comforts: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary" (St. Luke x. 41, 42). "Mary," thy sister, tranquilly seated at my feet, and engaged in listening to my words, "has chosen the better part" (*Ibid.*), which consists in simplicity of heart and not in a multitude of practices; she is rewarded by the calm repose found in my presence, and tastes in its source the sweetness of my heavenly instructions; whereas you are disturbed and distracted by the diversity of your pursuits and the uncontrolled ardor of your disposition.

Simplicity extends its blessed effects from the interior to the exterior of the Christian; a dis-

cerning eye will quickly detect which of two persons possessing piety is interior and simple, and which is not; the style of the countenance, manner, conversation, and whole deportment plainly indicates the fact. The chosen servants of God bear an external impress of his hand which cannot be described in words; it strikes the beholders, yet few among them trace it to its origin—the exterior influence of that heavenly simplicity which has firmly established its empire in the heart. When God takes possession of a soul in prayer, discloses to her the rich treasures hidden under the simplicity of spiritual infancy, and imparts to her an interior spirit, the external alteration will correspond with the internal and, imperceptibly to himself, the Christian's outward man will undergo a transformation.

CHAPTER XLI.

OF THE ABNEGATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

ONE of the most remarkable sentences in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is this: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (St. Matt. xvi. 24). Since it is only by the practise of self-denial we can follow Jesus Christ, it is evident he must have given us the example of that self-

denial, for he requires nothing of us which he has not practised in the highest perfection. The difficulty is to explain in what the interior self-denial of Christ can have consisted. We can easily discover what we have to renounce in ourselves; our whole nature is corrupted by sin; everything diverts us from the practise of virtue; everything disposes us to the commission of evil. The suggestions of the senses and imagination are the source of much danger to the soul; those of the will and judgment are still more fraught with peril: the one perverts, while the other blinds. Pride and self-love are interwoven with our very existence, and the great incentives to our passions and vices. It is, then, indispensably necessary that, in order to follow Jesus Christ, we renounce ourselves totally, both in body and soul. Every Christian enlightened on his duties and desirous of his salvation admits this general principle; those who fail to reduce it to practice can impute the inconsistency only to a deficiency of courage and generosity, and therefore stand self-condemned before God.

In what could Jesus Christ renounce himself? His flesh was pure, holy, and divine; far from being susceptible of the impressions of concupiscence, it was entirely subject to the dominion of his spirit, as his spirit was subject to the empire of grace. He allowed nature no more than indis-

pensable indulgence, and was absolutely incapable of excess in attention to his corporal wants. The faculties of his soul were under the immediate control of the Word, and directed not merely to a good but even to the most perfect end. Its first impulses were essentially supernatural and absolutely dependent on grace; therefore, far from requiring to repress, he had but to follow their natural tendency. They were, moreover, under strict subjection to his impeccable will and originated in its express consent. In fine, his interior and exterior faculties were so entirely subordinate to the will of the Word (a fact which cannot be controverted without blasphemy) that it is quite evident there existed in Jesus Christ no grounds for self-renunciation, and that in him the wonderful self-denial we admire was the result, not of necessity but of pure love and a heroic spirit of sacrifice. In what did he renounce himself? In all things. How far? As far as was possible to a Man-God.

He renounced his body, and refused to avail himself of the exemptions he might have claimed in virtue of the hypostatical union, subjecting his flesh to human wants, weakness, and infirmities. He renounced the glory and the bliss which were the appendage of that flesh from the moment of its union with the Divinity, embracing as its portion on earth the extreme of poverty,

privation, labor, mortification, suffering, and humiliation, followed by torments inexpressibly agonizing and ignominious, and, finally, by a violent and shameful death.

He renounced his repose, encountering here below perpetual fatigue, annoyance, contradiction, and calumny; ever exposed to the fury of men as well as to the rage of the infernal spirits, who were, in fact, the real instigators of human barbarity—at the mercy of their united hatred and envy from his very cradle; obliged, in his helpless infancy, to flee into a foreign land, frequently to change his dwelling, and, by concealment, to baffle the malice of his persecutors.

He renounced his reputation, consenting to be reputed more criminal than the malefactor with whom he was compared; refraining from uttering a word in his own justification when publicly accused before the constituted authorities of the most odious crimes; submitting to be buffeted, outraged, treated as a fool, a mock king, and a false prophet; to be stripped and scourged, to be nailed to the cross as a vile slave, and insulted on that cross with unfeeling derision.

He renounced the glorious prerogative of his innocence and sanctity, assuming in the eyes of his Father the appearance of a sinner, transferring to himself the guilt of the human race; becoming in the sight of God an object of male-

diction, and devoting himself to the awful anathema due to a justly-condemned criminal.

He renounced the consoling testimony of conscience, which so sweetly and powerfully supports the just under their trials, considering our sins as his personal guilt, deploring their enormity with the deepest sorrow and the bitterest self-reproach ; embracing the punishment entailed by them with the interior confusion of a convicted criminal, and sincerely acknowledging his claim to still more severe chastisement.

The bitterness of his chalice would have been infinitely alleviated by the knowledge that for the bulk of men he drank it not in vain ; that consoling belief he renounced. He died with a conviction, as firm as it was clear, that the number of the reprobate who should perish through the abuse of his mercy would incomparably surpass that of the elect who should be saved through his merits. He died knowing that the pledge of his incomprehensible love for the human race would one day be perverted by libertines and sinners into a motive for refusing to believe in him—for insulting, blaspheming, and outraging him more impiously and cruelly than the very Jews themselves.

He renounced the sweet consolations of heaven, the cheering evidences of his Father's predilection, submitting to the bitterness of utter

bereavement, and voluntarily breathing his last sigh in that deep desolation.

What universal self-renunciation ! Does he require anything like this, not of Christians in general, but even of those souls whom he plunges most deeply in the crucible of tribulation ? Does not his practice fully authorize his precept, that we must renounce ourselves if we intend to follow his steps ? The foregoing detail, though far from being exhausted, terrifies our imagination, bewilders our reason, almost staggers our faith ; how would it be if we were capable of appreciating the motives of that renunciation, the excess of love by which it was undertaken and completed, the perfection with which it was practised—perfection excluding even an interior regret or complaint ?

With such an example in view, should the disciples of Jesus Christ shrink from contemplating the precept of self-denial ? What does he ask that is not far beneath his own practice ? what that we are not obliged to grant for the sake of our own dearest interests, and still more for the love we owe our merciful Saviour ? If we are insensible to the motives of love and gratitude let us at least be alive to those more closely connected with our personal advantage. He requires that we renounce ourselves as far as is necessary to guard against sin ; can anything be more reason-

able? If such self-denial were not a precept, ought we not to embrace it of our own accord? Is it not our greatest interest to avoid sin and all risk of sin? Do we not lose all in losing God's grace? Is any restraint, any privation, any mortification too great to insure the preservation of this priceless treasure? The Almighty has attached our eternal happiness to one condition—the love, here below, of his divine perfections. He is master of his gifts, and, therefore, free to dispose of them on his own terms; but, even independently of this consideration, the condition proposed is in itself so reasonable, and even so indispensable, that with any degree of conscientious feeling we cannot refrain from acknowledging its justice. Can we really love God and yet refuse to adopt the vigilance and the self-renunciation necessary to the preservation of his friendship?

This branch of self-denial is most comprehensive. To renounce sin in sincerity it is necessary to avoid all occasions of sin, to combat the inclinations which lead to sin, to guard the senses, to declare war against the passions, and narrowly to observe the movements of the heart, for our entire nature is corrupted and prone to evil. The connection here between cause and effect is evident. It is not sufficient to renounce mortal sin; renunciation must extend also to

venial transgressions, which should never be committed deliberately, for they lead to mortal, either by disposing the soul for greater guilt or by entailing on her the Divine anger and chastisement.

If I voluntarily resist the grace of God, if I do not deny myself so far as to execute all the good he requires, and that as often as the occasion offers, without heeding difficulties and repugnances, he will withdraw his graces, and it becomes a mere chance whether, under certain critical circumstances, in certain importunate temptations, I shall not fall grievously. If, on the contrary, I am faithful to grace, to what perfection of self-renunciation may I not attain under its guidance !

But how shall I be habitually attentive to grace without recollection, silence, attention to the presence of God, and the frequent use of prayer and meditation? The voice of the Lord can be heard only by the heart which is at all times present to itself, which avoids dissipation, curiosity, ardor, and impetuosity; which is on its guard against the vagaries of the imagination and the constant assaults of multitudinous thoughts and desires, at best useless and unprofitable. What an inexhaustible subject of perpetual self-denial ! How shall I be faithful to grace if I have determined to oppose its sug-

gestions even on one single point? On that point it will perseveringly insist; if I resolutely resist the appeal, can I calculate on the consequences?

The weight of nature impels me downwards; the concerns of the earth, being ever present to my view, inevitably engage my interest; the continually recurring necessities of my material portion demand constant attention. I live amidst beings whose thoughts, affections, and conversation are wholly engrossed by temporal advantages—alone capable, in their estimation, of conferring happiness; beings who look with contemptuous aversion on all maintaining contrary opinions. Can I counteract the tendencies of my nature? Can I elevate myself, on supernatural principles, above the influence of transitory things? can I use them without detachment? can I consider the necessity of providing for my corporal wants as a painful duty imposed by Divine Providence, lamenting while I supply the legitimate demands of nature? can I resist human respect? can I withstand the maxims, the example, the satire, the ridicule, the opposition of the world without exercising an eminent degree of abnegation? If I mean to secure salvation, does not the practise of that abnegation become indispensable? It is, in fact, closely identified with the eternal interests of every Christian, and

this conviction it was which peopled the deserts and still induces multitudes of both sexes irrevocably to renounce the world. To what heroism of self-denial must not the pure desire of imitating Jesus Christ stimulate souls capable of appreciating so sublime a motive—souls whose personal interests are absorbed by those of the Most High, souls ready to sacrifice themselves to the glory of God, and ignorant of any other happiness than is found in the accomplishment of his will! Is any degree of abnegation, any extremity of tribulation, too appalling to the saint who has imbibed his love, his courage, his generous disinterestedness in the adorable Heart of Jesus? He can discern but hidden sweetness in the sentence so terrible to the pusillanimous: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” Earth contains no object which he is not ready to immolate for the name of Jesus; attracted by the odor of his Saviour’s perfumes, he burns with ardor to follow the blood-stained traces of his sacred footsteps. Were he differently disposed he would forfeit his claim to the only treasure he prizes—the especial predilection of his Redeemer; to the only title he ambitions—that of Christ’s devoted spouse.

Yes, my Divine Saviour! I know that to consecrate my being to thee and to renounce it are

one and the same thing ; and that I can live by thy life only in as far as I die to myself. Enable me, I beseech thee, at this moment to produce the most perfect act of self-renunciation of which I am capable—an act such as thou requirest. Assist me to reduce that act to practice throughout my life. Strengthen me to die perfectly to nature here below, and grant that I may live to thee for a happy eternity !

CHAPTER XLII.

OF THE MANNER IN WHICH JESUS CHRIST
TREATED OF THE CONCERNS OF HIS
FATHER.

THE method which Christ adopted in discharging the duties assigned him by his Father furnishes another example of perfect self-renunciation. He came on earth to accomplish the greatest work which could attract a God from heaven : to promote the glory of the Deity, to manifest to men the name of their Creator ; to effect the salvation of the human race, and to destroy the empire of the devil, from whose countless altars ascended the incense of adoration, ostensibly offered to the false deities. He was consumed with zeal for his Father's glory, which he earnestly desired to repair ; he was grieved at

the vast extent of Satan's power, which he longed to subvert ; he was concerned at the blindness, the depravity, and perdition of men whom he aspired to enlighten, to sanctify, and to save. A choice of means to insure these ends was at his option, and it was impossible that any measures adopted by his supreme power and wisdom should fail in the expected result. But his Father had already disposed his destiny ; he had traced out the plan, and to that plan his obedient Son faithfully adhered, neither omitting nor altering the slightest iota—disinterestedly sacrificing his will, judgment, and interests, allowing himself no inquiry, no argument, but in a manner compelling natural repugnance to yield to the ordinances of the Eternal.

It was ordained that he should glorify his Father by his own ignominy and humiliation ; this means appeared contrary to the end proposed, for to human reason it would seem that the degradation of the Son must inevitably reflect on the Father. But Jesus Christ did not consult the voice of reason ; he knew that his Father's wisdom was infinite, that his designs were incomprehensible, that no created intellect was authorized to question his decrees or intrude into his counsels. He therefore submitted to the use of the means appointed, he approved them, he embraced them with a firm reliance that the

glory of God must eventually result, whatever might become of his own, regarding which he had no solicitude.

It was decreed that Satan's ultimate overthrow should be preceded by a temporary triumph—that before its annihilation he should be permitted to exercise over the Man-God “the empire of death” (Heb. ii. 14) he possessed over men. What repugnance must not Jesus have felt to submit to him whom he came to subdue! And how could he imagine that the road to eventual victory lay in previous defeat? Nevertheless, he unhesitatingly believed the seemingly inconsistent fact, well-convinced of the infallibility of the measures adopted by his Father. How much it must have cost him to bow to the dominion of death, from which he was in reality exempt! Yet he consented to do so, leaving it to his Father to repair the consequences of the apparently irreparable catastrophe.

It was decreed that he should redeem men through the agency of the greatest crime within the capacity of men to commit, and that his blood, spilled by their hands, should be the purchase-money of their salvation. He overlooked an inconsistency it was difficult to understand; he knew that his Father would reconcile all contradictions, and he never for a moment doubted that the arrangements to which he blindly submitted

would terminate in results totally opposite to those naturally to be expected.

In the selection of the time for the world's emancipation the Eternal Father waited until the power of Satan had attained its height; until idolatry was publicly protected by the Roman emperors; until the corruption of the world had become general, and the false light of a proud, impious philosophy had combined its rays with the darkness of paganism. At that moment it was that Jesus Christ appeared on earth and assumed a position on the battle-field. It was ordained that of the thirty-three years of his mortal life thirty should be passed in the obscurity of a poor mechanic's humble dwelling and devoted to the pursuits of a laborious trade; his public life embracing but three years and a few months. How incompatible with the object of his mission must this arrangement have appeared to Jesus Christ! Having but a short time to accomplish no less an enterprise than the regeneration of the universe, both in religion and morality, why should nearly the whole interval be allowed to elapse before he revealed himself to men—before he opened his Divine instructions and made known his Father's name? What a trial to his love and zeal was that lengthened retreat! Yet he tranquilly submitted to it, silently pursuing the obscure duties of his poor calling; devoting the

intervening hours to prayer ; accelerating by his ardent yet calm desires the commencement of the great work for which he had been sent on earth. That work was more effectually promoted by the seclusion of his private life than it could have been by the display of brilliant eloquence and miraculous power in opposition to the order of Divine Providence.

Ignorance of the true God being equally prevalent all over the world, it would seem natural that Jesus Christ should have transported himself by miracle to every portion of the globe, universally diffusing the light of his Word, and supporting the truth of his heavenly instructions by the evidence of superhuman prodigies. It appeared fitting, at least, that he should establish the centre of his mission at Rome, the mistress of the then known world, and thereby facilitate the promulgation of his doctrine among the nations of the earth, who were ready to admit the authority of their Roman masters in matters of religious belief as in all beside. But God had arranged otherwise. The labors of Jesus Christ were restricted to Judea ; his instructions limited to a people ignorant of profane science, buried in obscurity, standing aloof from other nations, between whom and themselves there existed reciprocal contempt and hatred. He did not even fix his mission in its capital, which he, on the con-

trary, seldom visited, but confined himself to the small towns and villages of Galilee, a province too insignificant, in the opinion of the Jews, to be honored with the presence of the great Prophet; a conviction which in itself afforded them a plausible argument against the Divinity of Christ. He was not to announce the Word to the Gentiles, under which denomination was included the whole world with the exception of the Jews; his person and the object of his coming were to be alike concealed from their knowledge, and his first introduction to them was to be in the character of a public malefactor. He himself declared that he had come to seek only the strayed sheep of the house of Israel; he styled the Gentiles dogs, which were not entitled to partake of the bread of the children; and when sending the seventy-two disciples to preach the Word he expressly forbid them to communicate it to the Gentiles. Thus his career was restrained within the boundaries of Judea, and yet he came to enlighten and instruct the universe, and there is no other name given to men whereby we can be saved! To this mysterious ordinance of Providence he freely and calmly submitted.

As he was to select from among the Jews co-operators in his zealous labors, it would surely have been natural to choose the dignitaries of the nation, the clever, the eloquent, and the gifted.

These, his apostles, were after his death to diffuse the light of faith over the earth ; consequently it seemed necessary that they should be versed in human literature, conversant with the fables of paganism, and acquainted with the various systems of the philosophers. But, on the contrary, God ordained that he should attach to himself twelve men destitute of knowledge, of talents, and of all the advantages which insure to the possessor a great name ; men so totally ignorant, so limited in capacity, that they were incapable of understanding his doctrine, which, as they were unacquainted with the prophecies, they interpreted in a human sense. He could have opened their intellect with facility ; but this his Father did not permit, and until his death they retained their primitive ignorance and stupidity. If Jesus Christ had allowed himself to argue the point, would he not have pronounced the execution of his design with such instruments utterly impracticable ? But, trusting implicitly to the power and wisdom of his Father, he silenced the dictates of human reason, which was to be allowed no exercise in the fulfilment of a supernatural project.

It had been decreed that scarcely any success should attend his exertions during his life, but that everything should, on the contrary, seem to conspire against his efforts and blight his hopes.

He with difficulty collected a small number of disciples, taken chiefly from the dregs of the people, weak in faith, attracted only by the sensible evidences of his supernatural power, and incapable either of tracing his miracles to their source or comprehending their object. Two or three men of eminence believed in him, but they durst not openly avow themselves his followers, and visited him only at night, for fear of the Jews. The people who had attended his instructions, admired his doctrine, and marvelled at his miracles, suddenly changed their opinions when they saw him in the power of his enemies; they preferred a murderer and a rebel before him, and demanded his death in terms so vociferous as to extort from his weak-minded judge a reluctant assent to their iniquitous petition. Even among his apostles one betrayed, another denied, and all abandoned him; what, then, could be expected from the fidelity of his remaining followers? *We did hope*, said the disciples of Emmaus, on the third day after his resurrection; from the tenor of their conversation it is evident their hopes had become extinct. But what had they hoped? *That he would deliver Israel.* From what?—from the slavery of the devil? No; from the Roman yoke. To this end were directed the expectations of all his followers, including even the apostles; and when

a violent death abruptly terminated his mortal career they lost all hope, notwithstanding his reiterated assurances that he should rise again. In a word, it was ordained that Jesus should be denied his titles of King, Messiah, and Prophet, and even condemned to the death of a blasphemer, by the favored nation in which the Divine promises were centred—the very nation which had sighed for him as its Saviour and Liberator. To expire on a cross between two thieves, to see the fruit of his exertions annihilated, to abandon to incredulity and despair the hearts that had believed and trusted in him—such was to be the termination of the Saviour's mission. This he knew, and the anticipation should naturally have tended to depress his courage, to weaken his efforts, and to deter him from prosecuting so useless an undertaking. Could the strongest virtue maintain its ascendancy under such circumstances if it listened to the dictates of human reason or yielded, even trivially, to the suggestions of nature? This he knew, and in the knowledge consisted the miracle of his abnegation and of his abandonment to his Father's will.

It will be objected that he foresaw the great events destined to follow his death; that he had declared his intention of drawing all things to himself when he should be raised from the earth,

and that he was aware his apostles would perfect what he had not himself accomplished. This is assuredly true, but it is equally certain that the knowledge was powerless to alleviate his sufferings; he was not even at liberty to reflect on it with the view of thence deriving consolation. To imagine that the certainty of ultimate success exercised any influence on the determinations and the actions of Jesus Christ would be to form an erroneous impression of his interior dispositions. If he sometimes alluded to that success it was merely to enliven the faith and stimulate the pusillanimity of his disciples; he neither did nor could make use of the same motive to fortify his own resolution. His noble courage needed no such support, and his absolute renunciation of personal interest forbid his availing of it. In executing the great work confided to him by his Father he sought but to fulfil the Divine will; if he thought of himself it was only in the capacity of a victim voluntarily devoted to God's honor and glory.

Let us attentively consider, first, the manner in which the work of human redemption was carried on, and, secondly, the interior dispositions of Jesus Christ in its execution. The Almighty may one day render us instrumental to the promotion of his glory and the spiritual good of our neighbor; for these ends he usually employs interior

souls, wholly consecrated to his love. Let us deeply imbue our mind with the conviction, first, that God is infinitely jealous of having the direct and immediate conduct of all enterprises connected with his glory; secondly, that such enterprises are invariably regulated by the same principles which guided the eternal mind of God in projecting the work of redemption; every undertaking tending to his glory being, in fact, a consequence of that great work; thirdly, that the means adopted by the Almighty for the execution of those enterprises have in themselves no proportion to nor natural connection with the end proposed, but, on the contrary, very often appear to human reason absolutely opposed thereto. When God intends that the glory of any performance should revert solely to himself it is worthy of his wisdom to employ means which derive their efficacy from him alone and tend completely to disconcert human prudence. Fourthly, that naturally insurmountable obstacles, contradictions, inconsistencies, and apparent impossibilities must attend whatever bears the character of the work of God, and that it is by such marks that work may be recognized.

Once convinced of these truths, we shall easily understand the dispositions necessary for co-operating in the designs of God. The first is docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit,

dependence on grace, and fidelity in awaiting the moment when it shall please him to employ us as his instruments, never anticipating his will from the impulse of natural ardor. The second is punctual adherence to the plan marked out by Providence. To exercise our faith the Almighty develops that plan only by degrees, therefore we should not indulge ourselves in forming projects, devising resources, and anticipating opposition, but confine our attention to the use of the means God provides, never for any possible reason interfering deliberately with his arrangements. The third is generous courage in encountering the contradictions and difficulties which disconcert our views and apparently blight our hopes. It will sometimes appear that we have totally lost sight of our end; that instead of advancing we recede; that all is lost; but, far from abandoning the work under such circumstances, we should pursue it with redoubled confidence in God. To attain his end he invariably adopts measures of an apparently opposite tendency; he conceals his resources, and when we believe ourselves most remote from the term we have, in fact, nearly reached it. The fourth is forgetfulness of self-interest, which never should mingle with our efforts to carry on the work of Heaven; we should be ready, if such were God's pleasure, to lavish our exertions,

to renounce our repose, and, if necessary, to lay down our lives in vain ; since to lose all for God is, in fact, to gain all. This spirit of sacrifice should extend even to those points which seem directly connected with the glory of God and our own perfection. We are not competent judges of one or the other, nor need we fear to compromise either by executing the manifest will of God. It sometimes happens that God is pleased to reveal the destined issue of such enterprises at their commencement or during their progress. Such revelations, however genuine, should not produce too strong a feeling of confidence ; they should not be looked to as an unfailing foundation of security ; above all, they should not be referred to as an unerring rule of conduct ; this would be to oppose the designs of God, whose revelations are ever subordinate to the interests of the great virtue of faith, by the exercise of which it is that we really glorify our Maker, and insure merit to ourselves. Divine revelations are always accompanied by a certain degree of obscurity, which only the event fully dispels. The revelation is real, but the premature interpretation usually incorrect, and consequently a fruitful source of practical error. It may be laid down as an established principle that the event alone is the infallible interpreter of such revelations as regard the future, and that in no case

should they serve as food for the activity of the imagination or as a rule of conduct. This advice it is of the utmost importance to observe.

The foregoing remarks apply, to a certain extent, to the management of temporal affairs which enter into the order of Providence, and are destined to promote the glory of God as well as the sanctification of men. That they may be subservient to these ends they must be directed by the will of God ; if we were faithful in seeking the accomplishment of that will and in taking counsel of the Spirit of light we should find that the Almighty would in return watch over our interests with peculiar tenderness and solicitude. We should beware of forming projects, pursuing them with excessive ardor, fixing our hearts on their successful issue, and indulging impatient vexation at their failure. Above all, we should endeavor to discover in prayer the line of conduct the Almighty wills us to pursue ; then follow up the views he has imparted, with utter indifference as to success, because persuaded that all things contribute to the advantage of those who love God. Little does it signify whether our undertakings prosper or not provided the glory of God and our own salvation suffer no detriment in consequence. That will never be the case if our projects be directed by an upright intention and their execution con-

trolled by submission to the Divine will, the passions being allowed no influence over either. The observance of these rules presupposes death to self and to all created things.

CHAPTER XLIII.

JESUS CHRIST MANIFESTED HIMSELF ONLY TO
THE HUMBLE AND SIMPLE.

“ I CONFESS to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth,” said the Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ, “because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones” (St. Matt. xi. 25). “The things” to which he alludes are the mystery of the Incarnation, and its consequences. That mystery is one of abjection, or rather of annihilation. By its union with the Word the humanity of Jesus Christ became so completely absorbed in God as, in a moral sense, to lose all personal existence. It embraced all that is most contemptible in human estimation—poverty, scorn, opprobrium, and even the agonies of a violent and ignominious death. It clothed itself with our sins; accepted the shame and the punishment attached to them, and acknowledged itself deserving of that punishment. As there is but one person in Jesus Christ it was that Di-

vine person which thus endured the confusion, the chastisement, and the oppressive sensation of the guilt of sin, compared with which last humiliation all others dwindle into nothing.

The worldly wise among Christians assent to the truth of this mystery and declare themselves willing to seal the belief in their blood. But they have never closely examined its meaning; they have never learned to understand or relish its sublimity; their faith in it exercises no influence over their susceptibility, their pride, or their self-love. Their acquaintance with it is merely speculative; they have never investigated its depths with a view to the practical study of the humility it inculcates. It is in the interior dispositions of Jesus, far more than in the external display of his abjection, that we should seek illustrations of that great virtue. In his adorable Heart alone can we imbibe a correct idea of true humility, a sincere esteem of it above all other moral virtues, and a clear conviction that without it the Christian's title is but a vain and empty name.

Yes, the sentiments, the expressions, the whole conduct of Christians in general prove them to be utter strangers to this truth. It is concealed from them because they bring to the perusal of the Gospel, and even to the very feet of Jesus Christ, minds inflated with pride and self-sufficiency, be-

cause they have never thoroughly humbled their souls at prayer, but, on the contrary, ever rebelled against the simplicity of childhood and the renunciation of their imaginary lights; yet it is certain that their own wisdom must be sacrificed before they can be imbued with wisdom from on high. They indignantly reject a place among the little ones of Christ, and therefore God hides from them his own Divine secrets as well as the treasures of knowledge concealed in his adorable Son. A full and entire renunciation of human reason seems to them a degradation of man's mental faculties, because they have never understood that the edifice of perfection can be erected only on the ruins of pride. Never will those be great in God's estimation who stand high in their own. Penetrate to the very foundations of your pride; eradicate it totally; leave not a vestige of it behind; and then you will begin to understand and feel the length, and breadth, and full extent of the humility of Jesus Christ. Your own individual miseries, and the strange corruption of the race to which you belong, will reveal to you the source of that incomprehensible humility. You will wonder that so efficacious a remedy has hitherto proved powerless to heal your pride; and thus the contemplation of the heart of Jesus, united to the consideration of the miseries of your own, will furnish abundant and irresistible

motives of interior confusion, humiliation, and annihilation.

These observations apply to all Christians who, devoid of an interior spirit, make no effort to acquire it; who neglect the practice of recollection and prayer, which prepare the way for it; who regulate their estimate of heavenly things by the standard of private judgment, to which they resolutely adhere, and who sometimes go to the lengths of combating and blaspheming the holy truths they cannot comprehend. Jesus Christ had in view such Christians as these when he blessed his Father for having concealed the mysteries of the Gospel from the wise and prudent. Many among them imagine themselves to possess a thorough knowledge of religion because they have devoted a considerable portion of their lives to its investigation. Yet, if they have not viewed it under the aspect of humility, directing their principal attention to this grand point; if they have not commenced the sacred study by the humiliation of mind and heart, although they may argue profoundly on theological questions, they are ignorant of the first elements of that Divine science which forms humble saints, not subtle disputants. Would that this maxim were deeply impressed on the hearts of those whom duty obliges to instruct their neighbor and animate

him to the practise of piety ! To become little ones themselves and teach others to do the same, such is the summary of their obligations.

Simple and holy souls, whom a conviction of your incapacity to understand heavenly things has induced to abandon yourselves to the guidance of the Holy Ghost ; faithful disciples of the Spirit who teaches all truth ; favored beings to whom the light of heaven is discernible, even amidst the obscurity of faith which envelops you, happy are you, for your heavenly Father has revealed to you what he conceals from multitudes. Humility is the source of your sublime knowledge, and that knowledge is itself intended as an incentive to increased humility. Be careful that it conduce to this end, and then the mystery of Jesus Christ will gradually be manifested more fully and entirely. As you should never cease to sound the depths of the humility of Christ, so should you never relax in the practical pursuit of that heavenly virtue. Should you either desist from or assign limits to your efforts for the attainment of that death to self, in which consists the life of the spirit, the ray of heavenly light will be arrested in its course ; it will be obscured, and perhaps extinguished. God grants that light, not as an encouragement to presumptuous confidence, subtle vanity, and preference of self to others less privileged, but as

a stimulus to more profound humility and more entire submission to those crucifying operations of grace which tend to interior annihilation. Why was Jesus Christ the most humble of men? Because he most perfectly understood the majesty of the Creator and the nothingness of the creature. And why was he replenished with the supernatural light whence that knowledge emanated? Because, as St. Paul assures us, the first voluntary act of his life was one of annihilation. Humility should be the fruit of the first supernatural light vouchsafed to us, and then humility will be the source of all the lights which follow. "Deep calleth on deep" (Ps. xli. 8). The higher the soul ascends to God the lower she sinks in her own nothingness; the more entirely she feels her nothingness, the more intimately she is united to God.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ON INORDINATE ZEAL, AS REPROVED BY JESUS CHRIST.

THE Samaritans having refused, through enmity to the Jews, to allow Jesus Christ a passage through one of their cities which lay on his way to Jerusalem, James and John eagerly proposed, in the ardor of their misguided zeal, to

exert the miraculous power they had derived from their Divine Master in avenging his cause. "Lord," said they, "will thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them? And turning, he rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man came not to destroy souls but to save" (St. Luke ix. 54 et seq.) While they were intent on severely punishing the insult offered to Jesus Christ the heart of the meek and patient Saviour was engrossed with thoughts of peace and designs of mercy. While the apostles would have invoked a terrible death on his enemies, and thereby taught the multitude to respect and fear the Incarnate God of power, Jesus, far from desiring the destruction of the body, sought only the salvation of the soul, incessantly inviting sinners to repentance by the interior attractions of his grace and the exterior manifestations of his mercy. The prophet had declared of him, that "the bruised reed he should not break, and smoking flax he should not quench" (Is. xlii. 3). The zeal of Christ was characterized by intense ardor for the promotion of his Father's glory; extreme tenderness for sinners; disinterested compassion for human miseries; indulgent lenity towards sincere penitents; untiring efforts to reclaim the erring, whom his grace never ceased to pursue until

guilt had assumed the hopeless aspect of determined obduracy ; and, finally, by utter indifference to his own interests, which he never attempted to defend on the plea of solicitude for those of his Father.

Such should also be the characteristics of our zeal, but, unless formed on that of Jesus Christ, it will be liable to many defects, and the motives whence it springs justly open to suspicion. What is zeal? A pure and sincere love of God's glory, producing deep regret when that glory is outraged and earnest efforts to repair or to prevent such outrages.

To acquire the dignity of a virtue it is necessary, in the first place, that zeal be based on a supernatural principle, that it be excited, directed, and moderated by grace. If nature be allowed to interfere, if character exert its influence, if constitutional ardor or the vivacity of imagination take the lead, although the intention may be upright, there will be either imprudent impetuosity in words or indiscreet precipitation in action. True zeal is, no doubt, active in proportion to the exigency which calls it forth, but its activity never disturbs the calm self-possession of the soul. The operations of Divine grace are accompanied by a holy ardor, but that ardor is so tranquil in its action as never to encroach on the dominion of interior

peace. When the feelings are agitated, the imagination excited, the emotions of natural disposition roused, and the peculiar bias of character allowed to guide instead of being required to follow the impulse of grace, zeal should be distrusted, ardor repressed, and precipitation checked.

Secondly, zeal should be directed, not by the wisdom of the flesh, but by the light of God's spirit. St. Paul reproaches the Jews of his time that though "they had zeal of God it was not according to knowledge" (Rom. x. 2), attachment to private opinion so completely blinding them that they were utterly unable to discern the truth. Zeal of this description had made a persecutor of St. Paul himself. How prevalent is the defect and how incorrigible ! Persons imbued with it, and replete, at the same time, with inordinate self-esteem, are ever ready to adopt opinions which, although founded only on prejudice, they support with passion and obstinacy. Never submitting their conclusions either to the judgment of the experienced or even to minute personal investigation—nay, very often wholly destitute of the capacity requisite for pursuing such inquiries—they still rush on until they can no longer recede; they become at last incapable of listening to or understanding truth, and reflect real dishonor on the cause of God while fancying themselves effi-

cient agents in its advancement. Such was the position of the two apostles whom Christ reproved. Their zeal was founded on ignorance; had they comprehended the real spirit of the Gospel the desire of punishing the Samaritans would not even have occurred to them.

Unenlightened zeal for the reformation of ecclesiastical abuses has originated almost every heresy which has arisen since the ages of barbarism. Unenlightened zeal has considerably impaired the peace and perfection of religious orders by suggesting injudicious means of re-establishing primitive discipline. Unenlightened zeal inclines many to condemn as prejudicial to solid piety all methods of prayer which deviate from ordinary rule, and to censure, as liable to evil consequences the direction of those privileged souls whom God leads by a peculiar path. Generally speaking, it is unenlightened zeal which, under the pretence of checking innovation, has suppressed useful practices and substituted others of an injurious tendency. In order to conduct souls securely to perfection ecclesiastical superiors, whether secular or regular, preachers, confessors, and directors, cannot too cautiously banish from their system of morality the extremes of relaxation and of rigor, nor can they labor too strenuously to acquire the light necessary for forming correct opinions on all matters submitted to

their decision, particularly in the tribunal of penance. That light may be acquired by study, by recurrence to experienced teachers, but especially by prayer and an humble distrust of human reason.

Thirdly, zeal should be characterized by extreme meekness, with which violence, harshness, insulting language, bitter recrimination, and personal invective, are totally incompatible. How does God deal with the most heinous sinners? Does he visit them at once with the rigors of his justice, and after the first offence precipitate the criminal into hell? Were he thus to assert the rights of his eternal justice none could lawfully arraign its dispensations. But no; he gently represents to the sinner his guilty ingratitude; he invites him to repentance; he patiently awaits his conversion; if he chastise him it is always with the lenity of a tender Father; he in a manner exhausts the ingenuity of his mercy in order to influence and subdue the rebel's will, and, until the moment which consummates final impenitence, it is not allowable to presume that God has totally and hopelessly abandoned the sinner. You will readily admit that your zeal for God's glory should be modelled on that which the Almighty manifests for his own interests. You cannot more ardently desire or more efficaciously promote the correc-

tion of abuses and the reformation of morals than he does ; therefore your external efforts should merely keep pace with his internal inspirations. Your counsels, your exhortations, your reproaches should act in concert with his ; your labors should follow and not precede grace, and for that end your zeal should be animated, directed, and supported by that heavenly agent of human sanctity. Resist all temptations to discouragement and impatience ; avoid those harsh measures which may produce despair in your brethren and subsequent remorse in yourself. Do not discontinue your exertions because the first or second attempt has proved fruitless ; resume them with ever-renewed vigor ; await the propitious moment, and do not renounce as incorrigible the individual who, in defiance of your reprehensions, has repeated the fault you censure. This course of proceeding clearly betrays the latent agency of self-love, which swells with resentment because instantaneous compliance is not yielded to its demands ; it also betrays the secret workings of pride, which shrinks in alarm from the fancied slight implied in the delay to that compliance. Ah ! if God treated us so what would become of us ? If you wish to correct with profit, direct your efforts to gain the heart ; secure the love of those you desire to reform ; treat your neighbor with the tender affec-

tion of a parent; show him how much it grieves you to reprehend him and to effect his cure by a recurrence to painful remedies. In these cases it is that we should treat our neighbor as we like to be treated ourselves.

Finally, zeal should be pure and disinterested. Personal insults should not be avenged under pretence that God has been offended by them. Superiors should not imagine, as so often happens, that a deficiency of respect for the rule is an evidence of disrespect for themselves; nor confessors that hesitation in submitting to their directions indicates contempt of their authority; nor directors that the slightest deviation from the practices they prescribe manifests want of confidence in their judgment and of reverence for their opinion. Unless we closely observe our own hearts much personal feeling will mingle with our zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls. Too frequently it is self-interest we endeavor to promote; self-love we study to gratify; the thirst of domination we endeavor to satiate; too frequently it is the reign of our own authority, not the reign of God's love, we labor to establish. Hence proceed that extreme fastidiousness, that readiness to take offence, that irritable tendency, that unfeeling harshness, that overbearing tyranny; in fine, that detestable hypocrisy which, under the os-

tensible motive of promoting God's glory, seeks in reality but to satiate the yearnings of its own ambitious spirit.

A detailed essay on zeal would fill a volume. I shall at present limit myself to observing that zeal will never be accompanied by the requisite qualities unless based on charity and humility; that these two virtues cannot be attained in perfection without the habitual use of prayer, and that God grants the spirit of prayer only to souls devoted to him without reserve and determined in all things to follow his guidance. Again, that when zeal is founded on a supernatural principle, and subjected in its exercise to the controlling influence of grace, it is the consummation of virtue, the fruit of union with God and of total death to self. Therefore it is that we should long direct our zeal to ourselves before we venture to exercise it on our neighbor.

CHAPTER XLV.

JESUS CHRIST AN OBJECT OF CONTRADICTION
AND AN OCCASION OF SCANDAL.

ONE of the most profound predictions relating to Jesus Christ is that of venerable Simeon, who "took him into his arms, and said: Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resur-

rection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed" (St. Luke ii. 28, 34, 35). The very same circumstances in the life of Christ, the very same maxims, examples, and miracles, which some have perverted into a source of reprobation others have treasured as an efficacious means of sanctification, the opposite results depending on the difference of interior dispositions. The strange vicissitudes of unparalleled popularity and equally unexampled ignominy to which our Divine Redeemer was subjected effectually manifested the hidden designs of the human heart. The few who obeyed the inspirations of grace adhered to his person and listened to his instructions; the multitude who resisted grace secretly hated and openly persecuted him. His conduct was irreproachable in the estimation of those who beheld it with the eyes of faith; a source of scandal in the opinion of others whose judgment was biased by prejudice. The same lessons which poured a flood of heavenly wisdom on understandings spiritualized by supernatural views produced an impression of disgust and aversion on minds blinded by passion. His affable manners and unobtrusive habits encouraged sinners to approach while it emboldened hypocrites to condemn him, saying: "Behold a man that is a glutton and a drinker of wine, a friend

of publicans and sinners" (St. Luke vii. 34). The sublime simplicity of his doctrine had inexpressible charms for the upright of heart but was equally repulsive to the deceitful and double-dealing. The one recognized in his superhuman wisdom an attribute of the Godhead; the others saw in the obscurity of his origin and the meanness of his poor trade incontestable grounds for denying his Divinity. "How," said they, "doth this man know letters, having never learned?" (St. John vii. 15). Nicodemus declared: "Rabbi, we know that thou art come a teacher from God, for no man can do these signs which thou dost unless God be with him" (*Ibid.* iii. 2); and the people blessed God at the sight of his miracles, avowing that none like them had ever been witnessed in Israel. On the other hand, his enemies maintained that he banished evil spirits by the power of the prince of devils; they refused credence to his miracles because wrought on the Sabbath day, and, when unable to resist the evidence of multiplied prodigies, they became the more resolutely bent on his destruction.

We find it difficult to believe that opinions could have been so strangely divided regarding a single individual, and that individual one endowed with the exalted prerogatives of the Man-God. But this is because we have never sounded the deep depravity of the human heart.

It was the heart, not the understanding, which guided general opinions regarding Jesus Christ, and for that reason those opinions were strangely diversified. The ignorant could not err in their judgment of him, provided their investigations were pursued with upright views, and the enlightened could not fail to be deceived if destitute of that uprightness. "Blessed," said Jesus, "is he that shall not be scandalized in me" (St. Matt. xi. 6). How prevalent must such scandal be when Christ himself declares those blessed who have escaped its influence! This sentence is well calculated to strike terror into the soul of every Christian, for our nature is constituted like that of the Jews; our heart and understanding cast in the same mould as theirs. And if that favored nation, to which the Messiah had been promised; that nation whose brightest hopes were centred in his person, whose ardent aspirations invoked his advent; that nation which stood alone among the tribes of the earth which had arisen into existence; which had received from God a holy worship and a solemn ritual; which had been hallowed by the presence of a succession of prophets; which had been adopted, protected, and governed by Heaven, only with a view to the anticipated reign of its future Monarch—if that nation, so cherished and so privileged, was scandalized in its

long-expected Saviour when he appeared at last in human form—carrying its hatred so far as to pronounce him worthy of an ignominious death—how shall we avoid taking scandal at him—we, Gentiles in our origin and strangers to the promises; we who have been substituted for the Jews through gratuitous mercy; we who, in addition to the grounds of scandal they advanced, can further adduce the plausible arguments derived from his agonizing torments and shameful death? Yes, blessed is the Christian who is scandalized at nothing connected with the adorable person of Jesus Christ—his doctrine, his life, his death, his sentiments, or his virtues. That Christian assuredly resists the suggestions of flesh and blood, silences the whisperings of false reasoning, and listens only to the dictates of faith, by whose heavenly light he regulates his judgments and decisions. Faith teaches him that in every particular Jesus Christ is worthy of his reverential love and respectful imitation, and the more worthy in proportion as his examples are more calculated to arouse the repugnances of nature. But how rarely are such Christians to be met! Without taking into account heretics, libertines, and infidels, who all are scandalized at Jesus Christ, Christians devoid of a truly interior spirit, negligent in their efforts to acquire it, and wilfully ignorant of its nature, more or less parti-

cipate in that scandal. They adore him as their God, but are they willing to resemble him? They revere him as their Master, but do they practically respect his doctrine? They acknowledge him for their Model, but no sooner is the example of that Model proposed for consideration than they recoil in alarm, declaring it inimitable, and averring that it was never intended for them. Is it not being scandalized at Jesus Christ to esteem, love, and seek what he despised, hated, and rejected? to condemn, abhor, and avoid what he prized, sought, and embraced with a love of preference? And where is the Christian who can deny that this is to some extent his disposition? Where is the Christian who with deep confusion recognizes it for his own, sincerely implores grace to correct it, and directs all his efforts to this end? Where is the Christian who does not justify to his own conscience a system of conduct totally opposed to the ideas and practice of his Saviour? To justify a spirit opposed to that of Christ is to condemn and to be scandalized at his. Yet this is the case with the bulk of mankind. The saints generously labor to eradicate from their hearts whatever is inconsistent with the spirit of their Redeemer; but we are scandalized at the saints, and censure them for no other reason than their faithful imitation of Christ. This is the real

source of all the persecutions ever levelled against the true disciples of the Saviour.

Let us trace this fatal propensity to its origin and endeavor to remove the veil which obscures the vision of so great a multitude, whose profession of Christianity is but a name and a shadow, and that not only among seculars but even in the sanctuary and the cloister.

Pride and self-love are inherent in every human being; they are antecedent to and the origin of all sin. The tendency of pride is to excite rebellion against God's dominion, an independent desire of emancipation, an ungrateful forgetfulness of our boundless obligations to him who has made us all we are, and who alone can confer the peace for which our restless heart is ever panting. It refers everything to self; it rests on its own sufficiency as on a rock; it cannot tolerate any advance to self-knowledge; it shrinks from all allusion to its nothingness or to the claim of God on its submissive and adoring love. This vice transformed into a hideous demon the once glorious angel who aspired to be equal to God. It also effected the ruin of man, who suffered himself to be deluded by the hope that participation in the forbidden fruit would insure him a participation likewise in the attributes of the Deity.

Pride has been justly punished by the revolt

of the flesh against the Spirit, whence proceed inordinate love of the body, excessive desire of ease and comfort, and eager thirst for sensual pleasure—another fruitful source of sin—another tie to those transitory things in the possession of which we foolishly expect to find the happiness God alone can impart.

Pride and sensuality having plunged the human race into an abyss of misery whence, unassisted, it could never rise, Jesus Christ came on earth to apply to these two vices the necessary remedies. He displayed to the world the astounding vision of a God, obedient, humbled, and annihilated, because united to the nature of man, thereby exhibiting in strong colors the crying injustice and unpardonable guilt of pride which emboldens a creature to rebel against its Creator. Possessing in himself the plenitude of heaven's treasures, he evinced a sovereign contempt for earthly riches; he lived in laborious poverty and expired in torments to inspire us with a horror of indulging in sensual gratification, to impress us with the necessity of keeping the flesh under due subjection and even of sacrificing it, if necessary, for the salvation of the soul. His doctrine was in strict conformity with his practice, for he continually preached humility of heart and renunciation of the corrupt desires of the flesh, with all incentives thereto.

This it is which ever has been and ever will be a source of scandal to the proud and sensual man. He cannot endure the contrast between his sentiments and conduct and those of Jesus Christ; he is reduced to the necessity of condemning one or the other. Self-love forbids him to pronounce sentence against himself; faith, while yet a lingering remnant of it survives, will not allow him to pronounce against Jesus Christ. What alternative remains? Like all heretics, infidels, and libertines, to oppose the arguments of sophistry to the evident proofs and strong principles of his faith; to banish the importunate remembrance of its maxims; to neglect the practise of its precepts; gradually to dim and ultimately to extinguish the interior light. He attends to the exterior forms of religion, to vocal prayer, to the fulfilment of duties indispensable for salvation; but to resist pride, vanity, and sensuality, except in their grievously criminal excess, does not even occur to him. He is inflated with self-esteem; he allows his senses unlimited indulgence; he clings to transitory things as if he possessed no knowledge of Jesus Christ, as if he were dispensed the obligation of imitating him. Such is the system pursued by ordinary Christians. They daily devote allotted hours to prayer and pious reading; they hear Mass regularly; they assist at the offices of the

Church; they frequent the sacraments of penance and the holy Eucharist; they are exact in availing of indulgences, and occasionally they perform an act of charity. But they interiorly revolt against the slightest mark of contempt, the most trivial humiliation, the least deficiency of deference and attention; they are engrossed with the love of rank, dignity, merit, reputation, or, it may be, of perishable riches, which, in their estimation, comprise all other earthly blessings. They live luxuriously; they dress extravagantly; they indulge all the desires of their earthly portion, unless such as are imperiously condemned by conscience; they neglect the fasts and abstinences of the Church on the plea of prudent attention to health. Yet they imagine themselves better than ordinary Christians; they make an open profession of piety, and can by no means understand what more God requires of them; of interior virtue and death to self they have not even a remote idea. In some cases they devote themselves to the study of spiritual authors; they apply to meditation, or perhaps aim, in their own way, at a higher species of prayer. They discuss mystical matters with other spiritualists of their own stamp, each of whom aims at an opportunity of displaying superior light and information. Far from seeking, in such conferences, the acquisition of hu-

mility or the love of a life hidden in God and unknown to creatures, they derive from them an increase of self-esteem; they learn to view themselves as men versed in the knowledge of the mysterious ways of God, and, on that account, arrogate credit to themselves among a certain class of persons; they seek in prayer either the light which first dazzles and then deludes or the sweet and consoling emotions which foster and feed self-love; they have an absolute horror of aridity, obscurity, privation, and all similar trials, the tendency of which is to produce self-abjection, detachment, and interior death.

Are such Christians as I have now described true disciples of Jesus Christ? Have they studied the hidden dispositions of his adorable Heart? Do they love the poverty, the humiliation, the contradiction, the suffering, the ignominy to which he submitted? Would they voluntarily endure the same? Do they desire to do so? Are they at least confounded at their incapability of such virtue? Do they recognize the Spirit of Christ to be the life and essence of Christianity? It may be safely asserted that their opinions are of a very opposite tendency and their ambition directed into a widely different channel; it is but too true that they would be well pleased if Jesus Christ had redeemed them at less expense and if he exacted less perfection of his disciples.

They do not actually renounce his service, but they refuse to pursue the rugged path he trod and adapt for themselves another road less wearisome to nature. They dare not aver that the precepts and practice of Christ are to their ungenerous hearts a source of scandal; but his system of morality would more fully meet their views if it yielded some indulgence to self-love; his examples would suit them better if they did not offer so complete a contrast to their own conduct.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JESUS CHRIST CAME TO ENKINDLE ON EARTH
THE FIRE OF DIVINE LOVE.

THE love of God is the fire to which Christ alluded when he said: "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (St. Luke xii. 49). Before the coming of Christ men in general directed their love to themselves and to their vices, which they worshipped under the semblance of idols. The Jews, it is true, possessed the knowledge of their Creator, but they were insensible to his love, a virtue inculcated neither by the precepts of the Mosaic dispensation nor by the spirit of God's alliance with them. The law merely promised temporal blessings as the reward of fidelity and

denounced temporal chastisements as the penalty of idolatry. There, no doubt, existed at all times among the obdurate tribes of Israel a small number of true sons of Abraham; a privileged few whose minds were enlightened by the reflected brightness of the new law, and whose hearts were elevated above transitory things by the anticipated grace of the expected Redeemer. But the body of the nation served God from interested hope or servile fear, and so deeply imbued were they with selfish feeling that their rejection of the Messiah is mainly attributable to the disappointment of the expectations they had connected with him. His promises and menaces exclusively referred to spiritual blessings and woes; he inculcated the love of the Almighty for his own sake; he suggested, as the great stimulus to the service of God, the desire of possessing and the fear of forfeiting his friendship, excluding all views merely temporal, and thus he completely frustrated the long-cherished hopes of the mercenary Jews.

He came to diffuse on earth the charity he had brought from heaven, that it might consume the gross and earthly tendencies of our nature and destroy all incentives to passion, restraining our unworthy ambition for personal aggrandizement, reforming our corrupt affection for perishable objects, and laying prostrate the idol

self, by transferring to which the love due to God man most effectually mars his own vital interests. In many passages of his Gospel he forcibly urges the apprehension of hell's eternal torments as a powerful inducement to the fulfilment of the Divine precepts, but this motive he suggests only as a temporary substitute for others more pure, disinterested, and noble; he intends that the dread of offending should serve as a basis to the desire of pleasing our heavenly Master, and that the love of God, our Father and our Friend, should follow from the fear of God, our Sovereign and our Judge. He frequently proposes the everlasting rewards to come as a stimulus to unwearied exertion, but he dignifies the motive by identifying the joys of heaven with the possession of God and representing them as the inheritance promised to filial love, thus proving that Divine charity must be the origin of our aspirations after future happiness as well as the mainspring of our efforts to attain it through many sacrifices and tribulations. Jesus Christ reduced the commandments to the love of God as our Father and of man as our brother, expressly declaring that the whole law and prophets are comprised in these two precepts, which, in fact, constitute but one. To remove every obstacle to the reign of God's love in the human heart; to detach the soul from creatures, that

nothing may divide its affections; such is the great object of the heavenly doctrine which, to corrupt nature, appears so rigorous. That holy doctrine prohibits the love of self, except with due subordination to the love of God, and it demands that in all the gifts of heaven the Almighty Donor alone be considered, loved, and blessed. The faithful observance of its maxims must gradually lead to the perfection of charity, but, unfortunately, we have not generosity to renounce self-love, the irreconcilable enemy of the love of God, and therefore it is that we recoil in alarm from its lessons of life. The sweet virtue of charity, although invested with attractions so divine, with attributes so amiable, with prerogatives so glorious, is, by a strange inconsistency, the one most repugnant to our inclinations and most opposed to our practice, simply because it excludes the inordinate love of self.

Heaven is the abode of charity, which from eternity inflames the heart of God and constitutes the life, the essence, and the happiness of the adorable Trinity. What object beyond himself is worthy to engage the love of God? The existence of creatures is an emanation of his life; their amiability a communication of his perfections. The blessed spirits who behold his face centre in him alone their burning ardors; they

love themselves, it is true, but only in him, by him, and for him, and soon would they forfeit their glorious privileges could they forfeit the supereminent privilege of perfect charity.

In casting on earth the heavenly fire Jesus Christ was actuated by no other motive than the excess of love; and his desire to enkindle it is founded only on solicitude for our happiness. He knows that charity alone can open for us the gates of heaven, where our position will be more or less exalted according to the degree of Divine love we have attained here below. He knows that "he that loveth not abideth" and will for ever abide "in death" (1 St. John iii. 14). He knows that the most intolerable torment of the devil and his miserable associates is the loss of all capability and the absence of all desire to love God; he knows, too, that unless we devote this short life to the love of God, for which end alone it was bestowed, we shall eternally share the wretched lot of the rebellious spirits. From our acquaintance with these truths, and from our experience of the love of Christ for us, we may infer the sentiments of his tender heart when he uttered the words: "I am come to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I but that it be kindled."

This desire was not merely speculative; all his thoughts, words, actions, prayers, and sufferings

here below tended to inspire us with the love of God; almost to compel us with gentle violence to love God. From the stable of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary he is under all circumstances a Model of love; his example invariably inculcates the obligation of consecrating our hearts to our heavenly Father, while his instructions develop the nature and the measure of the love we owe him. If we could penetrate into the holy sanctuary of his adorable Heart we should behold a furnace of love sufficiently intense to inflame the universe. The fervor of that love is equalled only by the earnestness of his desire to communicate its ardors. Since he invites all men to participate therein, let us approach to catch even one spark from the glowing fire; let us transfer that heavenly spark to our tepid hearts, assiduously employing the means he himself suggests to feed and fan it, and soon it will burst into a bright, a burning, and devouring flame.

From the blissful regions where he reigns in glory he continues to pour on us the torrent of his precious graces, which may be compared to particles detached from the vast fire that glows in heaven. If the icy coldness of our hearts resist the action of that all-consuming fire, to whom but ourselves can the fault be imputed? If we even lamented our obduracy, and besought

our Redeemer to subdue it, through the infinite merits of his own tender love, we should soon experience the genial influence of Divine charity. Unfortunately, the opposition of our will to his renders abortive his merciful designs, for love must be a free not a compulsory tribute. It is a melancholy truth that we refuse our love to our Creator only because we are determined to devote it wholly to ourselves.

Descending from the contemplation of God's celestial dwelling, let us for a moment direct our view to the holy tabernacle, which has been for ages and will be to the end of time the self-elected abode of the Incarnate Word. Why does he reside there if not to impart to us a share in his love for his Father? Why does he give himself to us in the adorable Eucharist unless to render us participators in his life, the life of love? "He," said he, "that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him" (St. John vi. 57). Can Jesus abide in us without communicating a spark of the love which consumes him? And can we abide in him unless we endeavor to nourish the fire he has kindled? When we approach the holy table our prayer should be: "Remember, O Lord! thy object in coming on earth and residing still among us. I present myself to receive into my soul the sacred fire thou didst bring from heaven,

that fire which I believe to be thyself—for thy apostle tells me that ‘God is charity’ (1 St. John iv. 8), and Moses has declared that ‘God is a consuming fire’ (Deut. iv. 24). In receiving thee I receive not merely a spark from the fire of charity but its undivided substance; why, then, O my Saviour! am I insensible to its action? Thou desirest that it should consume my being, and my most ardent aspirations coincide with thine; what, then, O Lord! can impede the fulfilment of thy designs?” But the sincerity of such expressions is proved only by a cordial hatred of self-love and a practical determination to pursue it to destruction.

If our object in visiting the Most Holy Sacrament were to renew our love for Jesus Christ, to expose our souls to the eternal Sun of Charity, that they might imbibe the ardors reflected from its burning rays, we should derive from such visits blessed effects, sometimes sensible and always real, and gradually our tepid hearts would be transformed into the glowing hearts of seraphim. Without recurring to books and methodical acts, we can surely draw near to the fire with a simple view to participate in its heat; we can remain in its vicinity, passively to receive its action, which will be more vigorous in proportion as our own is repressed. But here, again, self-love interposes to baffle the intentions of our

Redeemer. We visit Jesus Christ in his tabernacle to treat of our own interests, not of the interests of his glory. We often bring to his feet a heart attached to creatures; a heart swelling with pride and arrogance, or burning with envy and rancor; a heart carried away by levity and dissipation, or overflowing with unmortified desires and unsubdued feelings; a heart agitated with many plans, disturbed with many cares, void of the Spirit of God, ignorant even of the meaning of prayer, and unwilling to acquire an experimental knowledge of the heavenly science; a heart whose affections are either centred in self or, at best, divided with God. In our visits to the altar we seek only to satiate our thirst for heavenly consolation; we are attracted not by the love of our adorable Spouse but by the desire of his caresses; the sweet and tender emotions of love we rejoice in, but its painful and crucifying operations we will not submit to, forgetting that the property of fire is to divide while it penetrates its object, to transform into itself while it destroys the substance on which it feeds.

CHAPTER XLVII.

JESUS CHRIST THE GREAT MODEL OF ADORATION IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH.

ONLY an Incarnate Deity is capable of offering to God the adoration due to his Sovereign Majesty. He is worthy of infinite homage, and that no mere mortal can present, because no mortal can communicate to an action a value he does not himself possess. As the homage due to God includes the entire subjection of the creature's faculties to the Creator's will, together with a solemn recognition of his dominion and an unqualified consecration to his service, it must evidently be the oblation of an inferior nature. To be worthy of his Sovereign Majesty it must participate in his own infinity, and, consequently, it must be the offering of a being equal to himself. These essential conditions were admirably combined in the homage of Jesus Christ; he adored in the person of a Man-God; he acknowledged himself indebted to his Father for his human nature, and he consecrated his being irrevocably to the glory of the Godhead.

In this sense it may be asserted that Jesus Christ is the only real adorer, a fact so indisputable that our homage acquires value in the

eyes of God only because comprised in and inseparably united to that of his Divine Son. Christ represented the human race when he adored God in his own name and ours, and unless we are incorporated with him, unless we are united to him as members with their head, unless we participate in the supernatural influence derived from close connection with him—unless, in fine, we adore God in and by him our adoration will neither be glorious to the Almighty nor meritorious to ourselves. This fundamental principle of our faith proves the absolute necessity of union with Jesus Christ and the interest we have in cementing that union by every means in our power.

As the adoration of the Incarnate God alone was invested with the conditions essential to a perfect homage, and as the value of ours depends on the degree of its assimilation with his, it is of extreme importance to consider its qualities, that we may endeavor to acquire some participation in them.

Jesus Christ adored *in spirit*—that is, his adoration was interior, founded on the knowledge of God and himself, as also on the clear perception of what, as man, he owed to God. In him the heart united with the understanding in voluntarily offering a homage as profound as his comprehension of the Divine dominion was perfect.

This is to adore in spirit, or with all the powers of the soul and all the capacity of the heart. "God is a spirit, and they that adore him must adore him in spirit" (St. John iv. 24). The Jews imagined they adequately honored him by immolating victims to his name, but in many passages of Scripture he expressed his abhorrence of those ceremonial rites and declared that the "host of praise is that alone which glorifies him" (Ps. xlix. 23). Is not the same reproach applicable to the generality of Christians, who punctually observe the forms of divine worship, who adore God by their external attitude and bless him with their lips, but who are meanwhile utterly ignorant of their obligation to adore in spirit? Exterior homage is of itself worthless, yet it is certain that none other will be offered to God except by such of his servants as cultivate an interior spirit. The soul may adore without giving expression to her sentiments by words or otherwise, and this species of silent homage is peculiarly appropriate to the pure Spirit who penetrates our secret thoughts and inmost feelings. The external practices which impose on men cannot deceive him; the spirit by which they are dictated and vivified is alone of value in his eyes. It is incumbent on every Christian to enter into a minute self-examination on this point, considering how far the serious attention

of the mind accompanies his prayers, and whether it is the heart, the lips, or the imagination which discharges this sacred duty.

Jesus Christ adored *in truth*; truth tested by substantial acts, not confined to sterile sentiments. He unconditionally submitted to the exercise of his Father's dominion and he freely devoted his life to the fulfilment of his Father's will. His mortal career was but one continued act of immolation to the majesty of God. His only concern was to glorify his Father's *name*, with utter forgetfulness of his personal interests; to establish his Father's *kingdom* through his own unwearied labors and humiliating subjection, and, adopting his Father's *will* as his sole rule of conduct, to accomplish it with more love and fidelity *on earth* than the blessed fulfil it *in heaven*. Such is the true and practical adoration which God requires. Protestations of devotion are delusive unless followed by an actual surrender of our being into the hands of God and a total renunciation of our imaginary right to dispose of ourselves in matters merely indifferent. In no circumstance of our lives are we entitled to resist the dominion of God. To adore him *in truth* we must submissively embrace the condition in life allotted to us by his Providence, faithfully discharging its attendant duties, which are all regulated by his will. If there be one

moment, one thought, one project, one undertaking of our existence wholly appropriated by self-will, private judgment, or personal interests we transgress the first duty imposed by that adoration *in truth* which should extend to every act and intention of our lives. Such was the doctrine of Jesus Christ, whose precepts and example we are now considering. Such was also the doctrine of St. Paul, who exhorts us, "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever else we do, to do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). To act for God's glory is to adore God *in truth*. That adoration embraces the motives of our ordinary actions, even those exclusively connected with the care of our earthly portion, and to seek any object in our pursuits except God's glory is to violate the obligation of adoring in truth.

The natural and supernatural Providence of God being identical with his dominion we adore him *in truth* only by submitting to the ordinances of that Providence. This is a subject which embraces an infinite detail. The natural Providence of God manifests itself in all events of life; in the casualties which influence our individual interests; in the vicissitudes of sickness, health, riches, poverty, prosperity, and adversity, in which daily occurrences we should adore God by receiving from his hand and profitably em-

ploying both the blessings and tribulations he dispenses. To rebel interiorly against suffering, to repine deliberately at affliction, to abuse prosperity by losing sight of its Divine Author and attaching the heart to it for its own sake, is more or less to transgress the obligation of adoring God in truth, because such a disposition encroaches on his glory or, it may be, leads to open infractions of his law.

The empire of supernatural Providence is even more absolute and unlimited. God desires to establish in our hearts a free dominion, founded on the voluntary and irrevocable consecration of our will; he desires that we should live in perpetual subjection to grace, that our actions and intentions should be guided by its impressions and directed to the great end of our being, his glory and our own happiness. To adore God *in spirit and in truth* we must detach our affections from transitory things and fix them on heavenly joys; we must regulate our opinions of passing events by the influence they exercise on our eternal destiny; we must die to ourselves and live to God; we must renounce our will and accomplish the will of God; in fine, we must adopt Jesus Christ as our model, laboring to imbibe his spirit and imitate his example.

We daily repeat many times the petitions
“hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;

thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Have we ever penetrated the deep meaning of these three supplications? Are we aware that they comprise the essence of adoration *in spirit and in truth*? We adore God *in spirit*, according to the intentions of Jesus Christ, if we truly desire that his name be hallowed or glorified to the full extent of his designs, in time and eternity, by ourselves and all who depend on or are connected with us; then by all Christians, and by the whole human race, which exists only to give glory to its Creator. We adore God *in truth* if we study to promote his glory in ourselves and all creatures, rendering subservience to this end the general and particular graces we receive from heaven.

We adore God in spirit and in truth if we desire that he reign first in our hearts and then in the hearts of our fellow-beings; if we facilitate his reign by obeying his inspirations, removing all obstacles to his undivided empire, and exerting our influence to promote the same end in others, frequently and earnestly praying for this intention.

We adore him *in spirit and in truth* if we sincerely desire that his will be fulfilled on earth as perfectly as in heaven; if we strive thus to accomplish it ourselves and labor to inspire our neighbor with the same holy dispositions.

In these three short sentences is comprised the interior and exterior adoration due to God: we should endeavor to imbibe the sentiments they breathe and to regulate our conduct accordingly. Then will Jesus Christ deign to receive our homage; to offer it to his Father in union with the infinite merits of his own, and thus insure it acceptance before the throne of God.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JESUS CHRIST A MODEL OF DISINTERESTED DETACHMENT.

ALL perfection emanates from God, therefore the glory of all should revert to him. No creature possesses intrinsic merit, consequently none can lawfully appropriate such merit. If man fails to restore to God the gifts received from his liberality, if he remorselessly retains them as his own, he is guilty of manifest injustice and meets a well-deserved punishment in the subtraction of the favors he presumes to claim. From these self-evident principles may be formed an adequate idea of the enormity of appropriating the Divine benefits.

Of all mankind Jesus Christ was beyond comparison the most privileged by heaven; the profusion of supernatural gifts was poured on him,

while the grace of the hypostatical union was in itself a favor comprising and surpassing all others. Yet of all mankind Jesus Christ was also the most perfectly detached. He referred to their true source his heavenly knowledge, his infinite wisdom, all his Divine attributes, never attributing them to himself, never glorying in them, never even casting on them a complacent glance. Thus he was at the same time the most replenished with spiritual riches and the most destitute of them; the most replenished, since God himself could bestow on him no additional prerogatives; the most destitute, since he possessed no title to those prerogatives and could in no sense consider them personal. How, indeed, could he have done so, since human feeling had no existence in him? But what was incompatible with his nature was equally repugnant to his inclinations. His will strongly opposed the appropriation of heaven's gifts and freely and fully restored to God the favors derived from him. The extent of his perfect detachment far exceeds the limits of our comprehension. "My doctrine," said he, "is not mine, but his that sent me" (St. John viii. 16). As man he possessed all knowledge, but, having learned nothing of himself, being indebted for his information neither to study, reading, investigation, or observation, he recognized his science to be an emanation of his

Father's wisdom, and in this sense he truly asserted that he taught not his own doctrine but that of his Father. The expression *my doctrine* simply applies to the doctrine he taught, and by no means signifies that he considered it his own, as is evident from the concluding words of the passage already quoted. St. Augustine explains this sentence as referring to the Word, who receives his doctrine as well as all things else from the Father by whom he is begotten. This explanation is no doubt correct, yet it is more natural to suppose that Jesus Christ here speaks of himself as man, confessing that the doctrine he taught had been inspired by his Father. "As the Father hath taught me, these things I speak" (St. John viii. 28). And again: "The things that I speak, even as the Father said unto me, so do I speak" (*Ibid.* xii. 56). He was ever unwilling that the Jews should limit their attention to his sacred humanity and identify with that the heavenly wisdom of his words of life, and he constantly sought to elevate their view to his Eternal Father as the true source of the supernatural eloquence which flowed from his lips.

In like manner he attributed to his Father, not to himself, the wondrous manifestations of his omnipotence, calling them "the works of his Father" (St. John x. 37), "the works his Father had given him to perfect" (*Ibid.* v. 36).

As a God-Man he certainly had power to perform miracles, nor did he require to supplicate his Father's interposition for that end—an act of his will sufficing, as he evinced in the cure of the leper, saying “I will, be thou made clean” (St. Matt. viii. 3). But as this power resulted from the hypostatical union, and as, in consequence of that union, his sacred humanity was in a moral sense annihilated, he neither could nor would attribute to himself as man the prodigies he wrought—referring to his Father not alone the glory resulting from them but even their actual accomplishment. “I do nothing of myself,” said he, “but I do always the things that please my Father” (St. John viii. 28, 29). The spirit that originated such a sentiment was surely incapable of appropriating the glory that belongs to God.

How dissimilar from the example of Jesus Christ is our practice on this head, and how difficult, even to the most heroic virtue, is the imitation of that example! We are indebted to God for every good quality we possess, both in the order of nature and of grace, and yet we appropriate them all: faculties of the mind, dispositions of the heart, talents, science, virtue—even the merely external advantages of personal appearance. It was never God's intention to invest us with dominion over any of his gifts—not even that of our being. The Scripture tells us

that "the Lord hath made all things for himself" (Prov. xvi. 4), and he requires that all be restored to him. But the spirit of appropriation is so engrafted in our nature that our very instinct impels us to assume a claim where we are, in fact, only dependent on favors lent. We imagine that, in consecrating our possessions to God, we renounce a right, and we miscall a sacrifice what is in reality a restitution. We are reluctant to acknowledge, even on reflection, that all we are and have belongs to God; we are unwilling to restore his gifts, when he requires that we renounce them either in reality or desire. To demand such a sacrifice is almost to rend our hearts asunder, and on such occasions it is with an effort we can refrain from accusing God of tyranny and injustice. Hence proceed our inordinate regret at the loss of health, riches, and friends; hence originates the rebellion of nature against the decree which condemns the body to death; hence arise our continual murmurs, regrets, and tears. Hence springs the struggle even of heroic virtue before it can resign itself to say with Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job i. 21). Hence proceeds the worldling's dismay at witnessing the exchange of a splendid fortune and brilliant prospects for the poverty and obscurity of the religious state.

“What a sacrifice!” people exclaim; “what courage! what generosity!” The object of those remarks probably imagines that she has done much for God by yielding to the repeated solicitations of his grace; yet of all she possessed nothing was really her own; therefore, strictly speaking, she has resigned nothing, and it is an evidence of God’s great goodness to reward the oblation of gifts received from him only to be restored when demanded—gifts which might at any time be reclaimed with perfect justice. Hence again proceeds our restless anxiety for the preservation of that reputation we prize beyond all other advantages and consider the most indisputable of our rights. The spirit of appropriation once extinct we shall cease to consider it our own; we shall be willing that God dispose of it, we shall readily acquiesce in its destruction, because viewing it as identified with self-interest, which will then have lost its value in our estimation. Hence, in fine, springs our undisguised satisfaction at commendation, which we look on as a right and receive as a tribute of justice. And yet, were it not for our unhappy propensity to appropriate the good qualities we possess and the good works we perform, we certainly should not dwell with complacency on such praise, however well merited, nor forget our obligation to refer it to God.

To renounce the spirit of appropriation is undoubtedly to attain the most difficult as well as the most sublime degree of perfection. To sacrifice self-love, self-will, and private judgment is to divest ourselves of our very being ; so important a work can be accomplished only through the united agency of a special grace and a heroic courage. The preparatory steps are gradual, embracing many trials and many spiritual victories ; at this we cannot wonder, if we maturely weigh the difficulty of eradicating the selfish tendency which is, in fact, the principal imperfection of our nature. The sacrifice of that corrupt nature, although of inevitable necessity, is as repugnant to our inclinations as would be the annihilation of our very being ; the sentence that condemns it to destruction sounds to us like the knell of death. Therefore it is that so few Christians understand the meaning of self-denial or the extent of their obligation to embrace its practice, and that those to whom the doctrine is intelligible find it almost impracticable. Speak to an individual possessing the reputation of a spiritual man, yet wedded to his opinions and governed by the impulse of natural character—speak to him, I repeat, of the necessity of sacrificing his judgment and his ideas as a preliminary to the reign of Christ in his soul ; he will not comprehend you, or else his deeply

seated prejudices and headstrong adherence to preconceived notions will insure the rejection of your exhortations. "Why," he will ask, "must I renounce the light of reason? Has not God bestowed it to enable me to judge for myself, even on spiritual matters? Does not St. Paul allow that 'every man abound in his own sense'? (Rom. xiv. 5). Can I divest myself of my natural disposition, and may I not lawfully indulge it as long as it does not lead to sin?" No argument can shake these opinions; he does not conceive the necessity, or even the possibility, of renouncing them. Observe the devotee whose whole life is engrossed by prayers and practices of piety while self-love holds her soul in bondage; who seeks herself in her devotions; who aims only at the enjoyment of sensible consolation; who, if she experiences a passing emotion of softened feeling or sheds a few tears, imagines herself inflamed with the love of God, while in reality she is consumed with the love of self; who shuns all opportunities of denying her will and resisting her inclinations; say to such a person that true and solid piety is incompatible with the indulgence of self-love; that she must learn to hate herself; that her devotion will be real only in as far as it leads to the fulfilment of the will of God by the renunciation of her own; these lessons of interior death and spiritual

poverty will produce but little impression, however discreet and cautious the language in which they are proposed ; and soon she will exchange your direction for such as better suits her views and inclinations.

A little observation will suffice to convince the reflecting that self is the great object of devotion, as it is usually understood and practised ; that our natural impulse is to refer all to self ; to attribute our progress to our efforts and fidelity ; to appropriate our virtues and victories and the gifts of God, claiming them as individual merit and personal property. When, to inspire us with pure, disinterested love, it pleases God to cut off the view of self and to reduce us to the spiritual indigence we so especially abhor we loudly complain ; we accuse our heavenly Father of cruelty, and we experience extreme reluctance in submitting to his operations.

The interior soul alone fully understands the real nature of detachment ; even to her it is not revealed in the commencement of her career, when self-love still clings to spiritual consolations—God allowing that attachment, imperfect though it be, because in a manner necessary to support her weakness. But as she proceeds on her way she acquires an experimental knowledge of the nature of true detachment ; in advancing from one stage of the spiritual life to another she

is divested of the appendages of the preceding stage, and were she to refuse submission to this operation her progress would in consequence be arrested. A misguided feeling of disinterestedness should never induce the soul to become the agent in divesting herself of her gifts. She is ignorant of the degree of detachment required of her as well as of the particular period destined for the exercise of the virtue, and by thus acting on the impulse of her own will she would rather confirm than eradicate the spirit of appropriation. She should calmly wait until God, having first obtained her reluctant consent, shall himself despoil her. In a word, under the operation which divests her of herself she has but to submit to God's action and passively to acquiesce in his holy will.

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